

Objective #1:

Articulate what participants know about who Jesus is coming into the course.

Summary Points:

- Theme 1 focused on how Christ is revealed through Scriptures
- Participants may have various experiences of faith, some with none and some with powerful faith backgrounds. Be prepared for great diversity and be sure to respect everyone, regardless of their starting point.

Reflection:

Who is Jesus to you? This question may be a difficult one to answer. You may be tempted to answer the question with some biological information: “He is the son of God. He lived about 2,000 years ago, was a great teacher, was killed, and then came back to life.” You may want to give a theological answer: “He is the Messiah, my Lord and savior, the 2nd person in the trinity, the fullest revelation of God.” You may wish to give a personal answer: “He is my deepest love, the source of my strength and joy, the light of the world who helps me and guides me. I can’t wait to be with him forever in heaven.” Keep in mind that your definition of Jesus is significantly impacted by your experiences of Jesus and is unique to you. What experiences of Jesus have you had that leads to your answer of the question: Who is Jesus to you?

Background Information You Might Find Helpful:

Discussing faith with teenagers is a tricky task. There are a lot of reasons why they may resent it. They place a high value on experiences, authentic witnesses, popularity, and privacy. So, there may be nothing more challenging than having teens share their personal beliefs or experiences of Jesus.

An important thing to consider in discussing the faith with teenagers is that this generation of young people are much more dependent on experiences than on logic. A person may have no experience of Jesus other than what they have heard someone else say about him such as what they learned about him in an education based setting. On the other hand, some teens may have had significant experiences of Jesus and simply have no words to explain them.

Today’s teens value experience and being accepted by their peers more than being accurate. A recent study showed that teens who knew the correct answer to a question would change their minds to match popular opinion even when it meant agreeing to something they knew to be inaccurate. Therefore, It is not likely that they would subscribe to Church teachings about Jesus due to logic alone. Saint John Paul II wrote: “People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 42). Just because someone teaches something about Jesus doesn’t mean that teens will accept it, especially if it’s different from what they have experienced in their own lives. If the only experience they have had of Jesus is that he is the subject of a class they were forced to take, don’t be too surprised if they don’t have much to share. If, however, the class they had previously was led by a joy-filled disciple who genuinely loved her students and Jesus, then the teens may have a lot to share about how they experienced Jesus.

As mentioned earlier, teens would rather be popular than accurate. Even if they believe something different from their peers, many teens will be reluctant to say and defend it. They would rather fit in than be different. They may not want to appear “too religious.” And, they may not want to disagree with anyone else. If they did, they may be perceived as intolerant.

Finally, faith has been considered a private matter to teens. This is not something they are used to talking about. When sociologists were interviewing teens for the National Study of Youth and Religion, they were convinced that their interviews were the first time the majority of the teens they surveyed were ever asked what they believed. They may need some practice finding the words they need to share their faith.

In your conversations with teenagers this semester be sure to meet them where they are. Allow them to be as honest as possible. Don't be intimidated or offended by their questions or challenges. Invite them to share genuine reflections, questions, and concerns with their small group. Exploring the faith is an essential path to owning the faith. Your role is to be their guide, a model of faithfulness, and a resource to bring them deeper into a relationship with Jesus.

Challenge:

Reflect on and journal about a time that you remember learning about who Jesus really was. How did he reveal himself to you? How is he trying to reveal himself to you right now in your life?

Objective #2:

Introduce the concept of "Revelation" especially that Jesus, the Word of God, is the ultimate revelation of who God is and who we are called to be.

Summary Points:

- Revelation is the way to God. It lets us know who God is and what his will is for us.
- The incarnation (God becoming human) of Jesus, his life and death, and ultimately his Resurrection is the fullest revelation of who God is.

Reflection:

When was your first experience of love? Not romantic love, lust, or a crush, but a deep committed love? Perhaps it was seeing the way your parents cared for you. Perhaps it was a time they made a significant sacrifice on your behalf. For a lot of people, the experience of love is what first defined it for us. Without an example of love in our lives it would be difficult to have any understanding of love. God knows this. That's why he didn't just send us a book with information about Himself (the Scriptures are much more than that). Instead, he sent his Son, Jesus. In order to know God, we must know his son, his Revelation. By fully knowing Jesus we can learn who God is and who we are called to be.

Background Information You Might Find Helpful:

Through the Incarnation of Jesus, the "invisible God becomes visible." (YouCat #9).

This act of becoming human was necessary to show humanity the depth of God's love for humankind. There is nothing that will keep him from sharing his love with us. He took on the same burdens, the same fears, the same abandonment, the same sufferings that we do. He was like us in all things except sin.

Jesus, in his humanity, reveals the Word of God. He tells the story of the who God is in what he says, but also in what he does. Jesus's teachings and His examples of how to love each other, even to the point of death, helps us to know who God is and who we are called to be.

The Greek word for "word" is Logos. For the centuries before Jesus, the Word of God (Logos) was revealed to the prophets and was handed down from generation to generation. These Revelations were eventually written and became The Old Testament which was, and still is, held as sacred revelation of who God is and who we are called to be. But, there was more God had to say about who he was and who we are called to be.

So, God sent his only son so that we could have eternal life (John 3:16). The Gospel of John starts by letting us know that Jesus is the Word of God, the Logos. Jesus, Himself, is the fullness of revelation. Jesus is the best way for us to know God. For 33 years, people were able to walk and talk to God, were able to witness his love and mercy, were able to hear his wisdom, were able to see the depth of his for us on the cross, and were able to see his infinite glory in his Resurrection.

It is through the Incarnation, the Word made flesh, that we encounter the revelation of God at it's best. If you want to know God, look no further than His Son. If you want to know how to live, walk in His footsteps.

Challenge:

Read John 1:1-14. What does that tell you about the "Logos" of God?

Objective #3:

Increase familiarity with the persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and Their attributes.

Summary Points:

- The mystery of the trinity can be best understood as saying that there is one God in three divine persons.
- The trinity shares the same “substance,” but has distinct “persons.”

Reflection:

The Trinity is a difficult concept to understand. Some theologians have said that we can't explain it without making a comment that is flawed somehow. This is something that is important to know about God. We can never fully understand Him because of our human limitations. The term used for this reality is that God is an “ineffable mystery.” He is simply too great to be expressed in words. So, because we cannot know everything about the Trinity, we should be cautious of not becoming overwhelmed, but allowing ourselves to be in awe of our God that is beyond our understanding.

Background Information You Might Find Helpful:

God is Triune (a tri-nity where tri=three, unity=one), which one God in three Divine persons (CCC, no. 234).

The word the Church most commonly uses for the way that the three persons are the same is “substance.” We say that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have “one substance.” They are not *like* each other, they are actually the *same* as each other. They are “one in being” or “Consubstantial.” That word may sound familiar from the Nicene Creed said at Mass.

Though they are the same in substance, they are distinct in three persons. The catechism refers to their differences as “modalities” or the roles they play. For example, the Father generates, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit proceeds. (CCC 254). How they relate to each other is what defines their distinctiveness.

All three Divine Persons share the same attributes. All are loving, eternal, etc. (see Theme #1, objective #2) (CCC 255-256).

A few ways to understand each person is the way they are revealed to us. The Father is the Creator (with the Son and Spirit), the source of **Love**. Jesus, the “**beloved** Son” (Luke 3:21-22, Matt 3:13-17) of God, is the revelation of God and redeemer of all people. The Holy Spirit is the very **love** of the Father and Son, it is the advocate for God on earth; it is the source of inspiration and peace.

Challenge:

Spend some time imagining ways that you could better understand the trinity. Be sure to pray for the ability to be at peace because you are not able to fully grasp the concept.

Objective #4:

Explore the Incarnation: Jesus' revelation of perfect love.

Summary Points:

- The Incarnation (Jesus becoming human) is an act of great love.
- Jesus's whole life and death are models of God's love for us and how we should love each other

Reflection:

This is a love story: There once was a grandfather who was assigned to watch his 7 year old grandson for a whole Saturday. The grandfather had a lot of chores to do that day, so the 7 year old would help as much as a 7 year old could. The grandfather loaded a wheelbarrow with rocks that he had to move. The grandson "helped" by trying to lift one side of the wheelbarrow. Of course the whole wheelbarrow tipped and all the rocks fell out. The grandfather laughed and resumed the task of re-filling the wheelbarrow again. This happened several times. And, each time it happened the grandfather laughed and thanked his grandson for the help. After an hour of accepting the boy's help (and having accomplished nothing), the grandfather asked the boy to run and get him some water. The boy, glad to be of help, ran into the house, found a used coffee cup in a pile of dirty dishes in the sink, and filled it with water. With a great desire to show how much he loved his grandfather, he decided that water wasn't good enough. He added some lemon juice so that he could bring his hero lemonade. When the grandfather saw the gift that he grandson had brought, a dirty cup with a brown, sour liquid inside, he laughed and said, "thank you" and graciously drank the whole thing. This is love.

Background Information You Might Find Helpful:

A person has to abandon simple mathematical logic to understand the nature of Jesus. The Church teaches that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man. That just doesn't add up in our human mind. It is a mystery the church identifies as the "hypostatic union."

The early Church struggled with this concept and several heresies were developed. Some believed that Jesus was fully God, so he couldn't be really human; he just looked like a human being. Others believed that he wasn't really God, that he was a human with divine powers. The Church definitively ended these heresies in 451 A.D. by saying that Jesus's divinity and humanity are united together "without confusion, change, division, or separation." (CCC 467)

In Jesus, God took on our mortal human flesh, shared our earthly experience, our sufferings, and our death, and became one like us in all things but sin.

Jesus's ultimate purpose was to love us. "He has loved us with a human heart. For this reason, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pierced by our sins and for our salvation, is quite rightly considered the chief sign and symbol of that love with which the diving Redeemer continually loves the eternal Father and all human beings without exception" (CCC 478).

The Incarnation is summed up in Philippians 2:5-8:

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus,
Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking on the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross.

This “Word became flesh” is how we know God’s great love for us. Nothing, not even death, would stop God from loving us.

Challenge:

Find a story from the Gospels that best illustrates how God loves His people.

Objective #5:

Develop a deeper regard for Mary in our lives as a perfect model of faith and her role in the Church.

Summary Points:

- Mary is the Mother of God, and leads us to her Son.
- Mary is the Mother of the Church who intercedes for us.

Reflection:

It would be difficult to imagine any spiritual value of the movie “The Waterboy” starring Adam Sandler. But, we see an example in the film (at least in the first half) of a strong devotion to a mother. Bobby Boucher, played by Sandler, has an infinite respect for his mother and often repeats the matra “Momma says...” to introduce all that he has learned about life. The Church has the same regard for our mother, Mary. We look to her for wisdom and examples of how to be a faithful people. We trust her to always lead us to her son. Our Church has a high regard for her “Fiat” (which means “let it be done.”) that she said when God asked her to be the mother of his Son and the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) that her cousin Elizabeth exclaimed when Mary came to visit her because they both show us a woman of great faith and obedience to her God.

Background Information You Might Find Helpful:

Mary is the second-most unique human being in the world, second only to her son (see objective #4). Mary was conceived without original sin (Immaculate Conception) with the very purpose of bringing about the Incarnation of God (CCC 488 - 492). She was approached by the angel Gabriel when she was asked to be the Mother of God (Annunciation). She agreed to do whatever God asked of her (Fiat) and proclaimed her faith and joy in the mission God has asked of her (the Magnificat). She traveled with her husband (St. Joseph) to Bethlehem and gave birth to Jesus (Christmas). She was with him for most of his adult life and is responsible for Jesus’ first miracle in the Gospel of John, the Wedding Feast at Cana (John 2:1-11). Later in John’s Gospel, she was at the foot of the Cross when Jesus appointed her to be the mother of John and the Church. After Jesus rose to Heaven (the Ascension), Mary “aided the beginnings of the Church by her prayers (Lumen Gentium, 69).” At the end of her life, she was “taken up body and soul into heavenly glory....”(The Assumption) (CCC 966).

The Vatican II document “Lumen Gentium” addresses the role of Mary and the Church by drawing comparisons between the two. Both Mary and the Church are our mothers. Both are given the task of continuing the mission of Jesus. In fact, any power or influence that Mary or the Church has comes directly from Jesus. Mary’s role does not take away the glory of Christ as God and Savior but draws us to him and helps us to know and understand him more. (60-65).

Marian devotion leads to a greater connection to her son, Jesus. The “Hail Mary” (based on Luke 1:28, 42) asks her to pray for us. The Rosary is a reflection on the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. The Magnificat points to the glory of God. And the

Marian Holy Days of Obligation connect us to Jesus in the Eucharist. One cannot have a Marian devotion without being drawn closer to Jesus.

As stated earlier, Mary's role does not distract us from our focus on Jesus. Many claim that we Catholics worship Mary as if she is God herself. That is not true. We honor Mary the way we would our mother. We ask her for our prayers and trust in her intercessions for us.

Challenge:

Pray the rosary in preparation for this session. Reflect on Mary's role in the mysteries and how she is drawing you to her Son throughout them. www.how-to-pray-the-rosary-everyday.com

Objective #6:

Become aware that our response to the Love of Jesus is faithfulness and discipleship.

Summary Points:

- When a person comes to fully know the love of God in their lives, it is natural that they will desire to return that love to God and others.
- Loving someone is not always easy. It requires a constant effort.

Reflection:

One day, a cameraman was filming Mother Teresa for a documentary, while she was caring for some of the most wretched of the poor of Calcutta. As she cleaned the sores of one man, wiping up the pus and bandaging his wounds, the cameraman blurted out, "I wouldn't do that if you gave me a million dollars." To which Mother Teresa replied, "Neither would I."

Background Information You Might Find Helpful:

People often associate discipleship with following a lot of rules that take the joy out of life. It's true that being a disciple requires discipline and saying no to some of the temptations of life. But, it is not true that discipleship takes the joy out of life. In fact, it's quite the opposite.

A disciple is a person who learns from a master teacher and lives their lives accordingly. What we learn from Jesus, our master teacher, is how to live life fully (John 10:10).

One of the most foundational parts of living a life of faithfulness and discipleship is a commitment to prayer. A disciple learns how to pray to the master teacher from the ways the master teacher himself prayed. Jesus modeled the importance of taking time to pray (Mark 1:35). He taught us how to pray (Matt 7:7-11). And, he shows us the importance of persevering with prayer (Luke 11:5-13). More importantly, though, we don't pray because we are told to. We pray because prayer brings us closer to Christ, the source of love and joy in our lives (CCC 2615).

A disciple is also called to be holy. Being "holy" may seem like something that is for other people, nuns and priests; but, all of us are called to be holy. We are also called, though not expected, to be perfect. Being holy and perfect are not things that we are capable of on our own. It's for this reason that the Church offers the Sacraments. We get strength from Baptism, the Eucharist, and Confirmation. These Sacraments are the fuel for the journey. When we fall short of the expectations, we have the Sacrament of Confession to put us back on that journey. Our call to holiness is one that we need to strive for every day, to get better, learn more from the master teacher, and let him pick us up when we fall.

Discipleship does not require a person to be a nun or a priest. There are several ways that you can look and act like Jesus. St. Paul tells us that all the commandments can be summed up by loving our neighbors as ourselves (Rom. 13:10). That simple act of putting others' needs before our own is a great expression of our holiness. Another way of being holy is by following the expression "when life gives you lemon, make lemonade". Jesus teaches us in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10) that good can come in the midst of horrible suffering. By being closer to God, we prepare ourselves to handle the burdens of life's messes. We can maintain

a sense of joy and keep our heads held high even when the world around us seems to be falling apart.

No part of being a disciple is easy, and it's not always going to feel good or be fun. Jesus only promises us that following his teachings and his examples will bring us a richness to life that we simply couldn't have without him.

Challenge:

Try to form a prayer discipline that you can commit to. Find the same five minutes every day (when you first wake up, on your commute to work, before bed, etc.) that you can set aside for prayer each day.

Objective #7:

Understand the goal of life is to know, love, and serve God, and to be happy with God forever in Heaven.

Summary Points:

- God created people out of “sheer goodness” so that they could share in his perfect love.
- People are naturally drawn to God and find the purest and most sustainable joy in closeness to God.

Reflection:

"What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself"

- Blaise Pascal

This quote speaks to the desire for fulfillment each human beings has in their heart. How do you find yourself trying to fill this empty space? With television, Facebook? Or with prayer and relationship with God?

Background Information You Might Find Helpful:

All people want to be happy. People’s understanding of what it mean to be happy became distorted after original sin entered our lives. Our desire for happiness comes from God. God has placed in our hearts such an infinite desire for happiness that **nothing** can satisfy it but God himself. (You Cat 281, CCC 1718) When people try to find happiness in ways apart from God, they find themselves unsatisfied after a while.

So what does being fulfilled by God and being truly happy entail? Eternal happiness is seeing God and being taken up into God’s happiness. (YouCat #285, CCC 1720-1724, 1729) Our Goal, and God’s goal for us, is to be happy— completely fulfilled. (CCC #1) Like two people who are madly in love, God’s hope for you is that you could be with Him forever in Heaven. (CCC #27) God loves you more than anyone on Earth could love you, and he wants only love and happiness for you. Deep in our hearts, this is what we want, too. It’s what we were made for.

But our world tells us that true happiness does not come from doing God’s will and living a life for God. Our world tell us that happiness comes from material objects and thinking of ourselves. We find ourselves looking to anything to give us the peace and love that only God can give. We are told sex, drugs and money will make up happy. But these only bring us happiness for a short time. These things are not fulfilling because they do not being **eternal happiness**. A lack of trust in the goodness of God is what leads people to sin. (CCC #398)

Because we are human, we fall short of knowing, loving and serving God perfectly. This is why Jesus came—to redeem us and give us his grace so that we can choose the good

according to his will and resist sin and its effects. (YouCat 279, CCC 1708-1709) Through the example of his life, Jesus shows us how to live a life that will bring eternal happiness and unity with God. (YouCat 280-285) Jesus is not the only one destined to be with God in Heaven and find this true fulfillment. Every person, from the moment of his life in the womb, has an inviolable dignity, because from all eternity God willed, loved, created, and redeemed that person and destined him for eternal happiness. (CCC 1699-1715)

Knowing, loving and serving God will bring us that eternal happiness. Serving God, and living according to the teachings of Jesus, although it requires sacrifice, is “Good News.” By giving our lives to Jesus, we grow closer to God, the source of real “life and happiness”. (CCC #30) Sacrificing the life that brings us instant gratification here on Earth will truly fulfill us. This is evident in the joy that many of the Saints had when they gave up worldly pleasures and even their own lives for the sake of knowing, loving and serving God.

St. Augustine is a great example of this. When he was younger, he lived a life according to the world. He partied, had affairs with women and lived a life according to his own wants instead of God’s. He later experienced a conversion and found true happiness and fulfillment in serving God and not his selfishness.

Challenge:

Be mindful this week of how you are spending your time. What are some areas of your life that you can be growing in your knowledge of, love for and service toward God? Become aware of what you are truly desiring when you turn on your television, boot up your computer, open your book, etc. How are you working on truly finding fulfillment in your day to day activities?

Objective #8

Articulate the Divine Revelation on death, judgment (particular and final), Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory.

Summary Points:

- When we die, we will be judged by God and either be sent to Heaven or Hell for the rest of eternity. Some will go to Purgatory to be further cleansed before they can get to Heaven, but will nonetheless eventually get there.
- A life in heaven is not something we can earn by doing things that are pleasing to God. Instead, Heaven is available to us through the mercy and love of God and the death of His Son, Jesus.
- We still have relation with those who die through prayer.

Reflection:

Sometimes we get caught up living for the demands of each day. We make a list early in the morning and assess the success of that day based on how many things we were able to check off the list by the time we go to bed. But by limiting the standards of a successful day to a checklist, we miss out on the purpose of our life here on Earth. God created us to strive for Heaven during our time here on Earth. This is the most important goal we can be working for each day. The reality of our lives being eternal should play a big part in the decisions we make each day—how are we going to treat those around us? How am I going to be spending my time? When we see our lives on a larger scale than just day-to-day, but as eternal, the structure of our whole day changes. How are you living with the goal of Heaven constantly in mind? What does that mean to you? Is it hopeful? It should be!

Background Information You Might Find Helpful:

Definitions of terms:

- **Particular Judgment:** This is the “moment of truth” for every person when God judges us at the moment of our deaths. This judgment determines whether we are bound for eternal unity with God or eternal separation from God.
- **Heaven:** Eternal life with God. Heaven is not a place, it is a state of being. It is the state of supreme and definitive happiness, the goal of the deepest longings of humanity (CCC #1023).
- **Purgatory:** a state of final cleansing of human imperfections after death so that a person can fully enter the joy of Heaven.
- **Hell:** The state of definitive self-exclusion from God. Everlasting separation from God, the absolute absence of love. (CCC #1033-1037)
- **Final Judgment:** This is the moment of Jesus’s triumphal return. It is a final separation of good from evil and God’s justice prevails.

Any discussion on Judgment and death should start with understanding that God’s love is ever-lasting. God’s love does not end with death. We are created for eternity, not just for life on this earth. Our life is so much more than Earthly!

And, what we do matters. Whether you choose to follow Jesus or not does change the way you live your life. Following Jesus requires a sacrifice, comes with rewards now, and keep us

on the path to be with God forever in Heaven. Turning your back on God, however, also has long-term consequences—rejecting God’s love can lead to eternal separation from Him in.

Hell is reserved for those people who willfully choose to be kept separate from God’s love. Anyone who truly wishes to be separated from God is allowed that freedom. That being said, God’s mercy is beyond our understanding. The Church believes that there is a Hell, but we don’t know for sure that anyone is actually there. While the Church proclaims that certain people are in Heaven (Saints), the Church has never proclaimed that any specific person is in Hell.

Praying for the dead is important. Remembering those who have passed and praying for the souls in purgatory is part of our Catholic tradition. (2 Maccabees 12:38-46) (Catholic Faith Handbook, p. 166) We believe that our prayers help them to complete their purification in purgatory and allow for them to enter the gates of Heaven sooner.

Challenge:

When you go to Mass this week, be attentive to the Intentions we pray together as a community after the homily and in the Eucharistic prayers. When your parish prays for all of our departed brothers and sisters, pray especially for any family or friends that you have that have passed away. Pray for their souls that they might see the face of Jesus today in Heaven.

Objective #9:

Develop an appreciation for God's gift of Heaven, and understand the freedom to accept or reject God's love.

Summary Points:

- God gave us free will to choose to love him
- God's laws make us truly free because when followed, they allow us to become who he created us to be
- God does not send anyone to hell, we choose to deny God, his love and his mercy

Reflection:

When we were in high school, it might seem like our parents had given us rules in order to take away our freedom. Some teenagers feel like their parents must hate them because their rules are "unfair" and "too strict." But in fact, parents give their children rules because they *love them*. Parents were teenagers once too, and they know that teenagers don't always make the right decisions; therefore, they try to give their children guidance for making the right choices and having the healthiest experiences they can. This is what God's love is like for us too. He tells us what we should and should not do in order to live a healthy life. He does not want us to get into trouble, but to come to know exactly who he created us to be. His rules do not take away our freedom, they allow us to be free to be who He created us to be—fully united with him in heaven as his perfect sons and daughters.

Background Information You Might Find Helpful:

We are born with the gift of free will. Free will allows for us to choose to love. No other living creature on Earth has free will—it is what makes us unique from all other creation. According to the Catechism, "Freedom is the God-given power to be able to act of one's own accord." (YouCat 286, CCC1730-1733)

During high school, teenagers are struggling with an increase in freedom in their lives. They are at a time in their life when they are given more capacity to choose for themselves. This is a good time to help them to develop a value for making good choices in their lives.

When it comes to making choices every day, it is important to remember God loves you no matter what! Nothing you can do can make God love you any more or any less. God never stops loving you because you sin. If we forget this, we can become weighed down by the many times we fail God by sinning against him. But he reminds us that his love and mercy are unconditional—nothing can stop his love.

That should not stop us from trying to choose the good in every situation though. The more one does that which is good, the freer one becomes to do greater good. The habit of selfish acts makes a person more prone to selfishness. So, forming habits of good behavior is critical to becoming virtuous and holy.

Accepting God's love will bring us closer to God, which in turn, will give us a greater capacity to do God's will, to love our neighbors, and to be with God forever in Heaven.

Rejecting God's love is always an option for us, but it would require us to turn from our true selves, to give up on real happiness, and to give way to despair. This path only leads us further from God... and ultimately to eternal separation from Him. Why would anyone want that?

God loves us so much that He gives us the freedom to accept his love or reject it. Hell, a life without God, is always a choice an individual can make. God doesn't send people to Hell, he allows us to go there, and it breaks His heart to see us choose that which is something other than his love.

Challenge:

When you are making a choice between good and bad, take the time to really ask yourself what you are making a choice between. Remind yourself that by choosing the good you are becoming freer to be who you are created to be. And by choosing the bad you are saying no to God's love. How can this affect the choices you make on a daily basis?

Objective #10:

Be challenged to identify themselves as members of the Communion of Saints, who are connected with the faithful who have gone before them, who are grounded in prayer, and who are fortified by the Sacraments, so that they may become who Jesus calls them to be.

Summary Points:

- All people are called to be Saints. The communion of Saints includes Catholics, both past and present.
- Both the living and deceased members of our community are called to pray for each other and ask for prayers.

Reflection:

When tragedy happens, many people find themselves asking their close friends and family for prayers. There is something powerful about knowing that people are praying for you. We believe in the power of our friends' and families' prayers. If we believe God hears and answers the prayers of the broken souls here on Earth, why would we not ask for the prayers of those who have passed and are with God in Heaven? Just because they are no longer with us on Earth does not mean their prayers are no longer of any value. On the contrary, they could be even more important because of the unity they now have with God in Heaven.

Background Information You Might Find Helpful:

The members of the Church does not just consist of those who we visibly see in the pews at Mass on Sundays. The members of the Catholic Church include all of those who have been baptized, whether they are living or dead. Those who have passed and are in communion with God are called Saints. To be a Saint is our ultimate calling—it means we are in full communion with God in Heaven. Because of this, the Communion of Saints plays an important role in our lives here on Earth, for it is a reality as much here as it is in Heaven.

We believe that we are to remain in communion with our brothers and sisters who have passed from this life. We are connected with the faithful departed. Just as we ask our friends and family here on Earth to pray for us and join us on our faith journeys, so too do we ask for help and guidance from our friends and family who have died. We ask for their prayers, but we also pray for them. We believe our prayers help our loved ones enter the Kingdom of Heaven if they are in purgatory, being cleansed before they can be fully unified with God (YouCat #146).

God made us to be in communion with one another. Because we were made for this, the choices we make effects the community as a whole. When we choose to do good, it builds up God's Kingdom and benefits the community. On the contrary, when we choose to sin, it does not just affect us—it hurts us all. (YouCat #146) (1 Cor. 12:46) Everyone is called to a life of prayer and holiness—not just for our own wellbeing but for the good of everyone.

The holiness is strengthened by the Sacraments that individual members of the community receive. The more graces we receive from the Sacraments, the more we are transformed by God to be who he created us to be. This community and their aspiration for holiness helps us to be who Jesus calls us to be. We are not in this by ourselves. Many have gone before us, learning the true path to eternal happiness and unity with God. Like the Saints of long ago,

you are also an example of faith to those around you. You are also a member of the Communion of Saints. That is who God made you to be.

Challenge:

Research a Saint today that went through a struggle similar to one you might be going through. Ask them to pray for you. Ask them to show you the path you need to take in order to find good in your situation and give God glory as they did in their life. Ask for the prayers of at least one Saint each day.