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## Chapter V

# Re-Creation

### UNDERSTANDING

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## UNDERSTANDING

## WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

### Transformation and Divine Sonship

Last session, we discussed how Jesus came to do a lot more than die on the cross for our sins. Think about it this way: If all Jesus did was die on the cross, humanity would have made amends with God; things would be repaired and a right relationship with the Father would be restored. But God loves us so much that he wants so much more than merely a repaired, just, peaceful coexisting relationship with us. He wants our hearts. He wants to be fully united with us and share his blessed life with us forever. In fact, if all Jesus did was die on the cross for our sins, we wouldn't have eternal life with him in heaven.

Here's the key: Jesus didn't come simply to die for our sins. He rose from the dead to give us new life. And he sent his Spirit into our hearts so that we could be transformed in Him and become God's sons and daughters, sharing in his very divine life and love forever.

Curtis Martin explains an image that the Church Fathers gave us for the profound transformation in Christ that God wants to work in our lives:

*Imagine a cold steel bar and a hot burning fire. They have almost nothing in common. If you place the cold rod in the hot fire, though, something amazing begins to happen: the rod begins to take on the properties of the fire. It grows warm, it begins to glow — and if you were to take the rod out of the fire and touch it to some straw, it could actually start a fire itself. Now image that the fire is God and we are the steel rod. When we are living in Christ... we begin to take on the properties of God.”<sup>1</sup>*

This is so much more than merely being forgiven of our sins! As Christ fills us with his life, we begin to think like Christ, serve like Christ, sacrifice like Christ. We take on the qualities of Christ: we become more patient, honest, generous, pure, and courageous like Christ. As St. Paul explains, we are being changed into Christ's likeness from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18). Jesus doesn't just want to pardon us like a judge. He wants to heal us like a physician. He doesn't just want to forgive us; he wants to transform us. He doesn't just want to save us from sin. He wants to save us *for something* — he wants to save us for sonship.

And this brings us to one of the most beautiful and crucial aspects of the Catholic Faith: how profoundly *real* our divine sonship is. When the Bible describes how God is our Father, we are God's children, and we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, these are not pious metaphors. Through baptism, we really share in Christ's divine life — the life of the Eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, dwells within us. And that life of Christ within us is like the hot fire of his love changing the metal rod of our fallen human nature. Indeed, St. Peter explicitly states that we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) — we begin taking on the character of Christ. The very divine life of the Son of God

<sup>1</sup> Curtis Martin, *Making Missionary Disciples*, 13.

fills us and makes us God's children. We become "sons in the Son." St. John speaks in awe over this amazing gift: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; *and so we are...* Beloved, we are God's children now" (1 John 3:1-2).

Note how St. John doesn't say we are merely *called* God's children. We are called children of God because that is what we really become! Because Christ's Spirit, the divine life of the Son of God himself dwells in our hearts, we are truly sons and daughters, and we can truly call God Father!

Finally, consider how the profound reality of this gift is expressed whenever we pray the Lord's Prayer. We say, "Our Father..." Two important points are made with these two opening words of the Lord's Prayer. First, consider the word "Father:" We call God Father because he truly has become Father. As St. Paul explains, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Galatians 4:6). Second, consider the word "Our." God is not merely *my* Father or *your* Father...he is truly *Our* Father because we are truly brothers and sisters in Christ, sons and daughters of the same heavenly Father. This is not a Christian figure of speech. The supernatural bond we share in Jesus Christ makes us truly brothers and sisters in Christ. Indeed, Christians share a brother and sisterhood that is more profound than the natural bonds we might share with siblings back home, for these are bonds that last forever. We are all part of one covenant family of God.

Thus, we can see that, when God sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross, he didn't do so merely to save us from sin. He sent his Son because he wants to fill us with his divine life and adopt us as His children. And he doesn't just want to forgive us. He wants to transform us—to heal our wounded human nature, perfect it and elevate it to share in his total,

infinite, supernatural love, so that we take on the character of Christ. He doesn't want to restore us to Eden, a mere earthly paradise; he wants to invite us to the everlasting perfect paradise of heaven. Moreover, he didn't die to save us each individually, isolated from each other. He died to save us all together so that we can live as his children, sharing in his blessed life as true brothers and sisters in the one covenant family of God. This calling is far more than an invitation to get along and tolerate each other. This is an invitation to live in what Christians call "the beatific vision," the very life of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All this is part of the amazing gift Jesus offers us through his death and resurrection: "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

### Transformation in the Heart of the Church

*Luke 10:16, Acts 2:42*

The profound transformation that Christ wants to accomplish in our hearts takes place in and through His Church. While it may be tempting to make the Church an appendix - a minor detail in the life of the disciple - that is not what Christ intended. It is *primarily* through the Church that God wishes to accomplish His sanctifying work in us. The Church Father St. Cyprian reminds us that "No one can have God for his Father, who does not have the Church for his mother."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus himself established the Church so that people throughout the ages could come to know him and his plan for our lives. That's why he gave authority to his Apostles to teach in his name. He said to them, "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16). And

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<sup>2</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *First Treatise*, 6

that same authority was handed on to the Apostles' successors, the bishops, throughout the centuries to today. The early Church was so serious about the this connection between Christ and His Church that St. Ignatius of Antioch - a disciple of St. John the Apostle - would write that "apart from [priests, bishops, and deacons], there is no Church."<sup>3</sup>

Take a moment right now and feel the weight of what this means: To accept the authority of the Apostles is to accept Jesus. And to the extent we knowingly reject the the Church, we are also distancing ourselves from Jesus. That's why it's absolutely crucial for Christians to follow Jesus faithfully within the Church, guarding the "deposit of faith" and not to holding a "counterfeit faith" based on our own opinions or the popular whims of the world (2 Tim 3:8).

Indeed, all that Jesus won for us in his death and resurrection comes to us through the Catholic Church. It is through the Church that we experience the transformation of mind and heart that we are made for as beloved sons and daughters of God. But how can we experience this transformation today? How can we live in union with Christ and His Church?

To answer this question, it's helpful to look at the life of the disciples in the book of Acts. Here we read about how the first Christians "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). We can think of these four key practices of a disciple — prayer, fellowship, the breaking of the bread (i.e., the sacraments) and the teaching of the Apostles — as the places where we encounter Christ in His Church today. Let's consider each of them in turn.

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<sup>3</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Trallians*, 3. To understand more about the nature of the Church and how the Catholic Church is revealed in Scripture, see chapter 7

In the Apostles Teaching, we ponder aspects of the apostolic faith that stir us to praise or challenges us to make a sacrifice. We form our minds with the revelation of Christ, not allowing ourselves to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds (cf. Rom 12:1-2). This all helps us become more like Christ. There are many good programs, retreats, books and resources that communicate the Catholic Faith; but two of the most basic place to start are the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the official modern-day summary of what the Apostles have passed on to us today and Sacred Scripture. When we read these works, we can be sure we are encountering the truth God is handing on through the Church.

In living fellowship with others, we encounter Jesus in our neighbor, the poor, the suffering and other Christians who encourage us in the faith and provide many opportunities to grow in the love of Christ by loving the Christ who abides in them. Christian friends are like "iron sharpening iron," transforming us and helping us grow in Christian character (see Prov 27:17).

In the sacraments, we experience the love of God in tangible, physical forms. In baptism, we become sons and daughters of God. In Confession, we receive the mercy of the Father through his priests and receive grace to overcome our faults. And in the Eucharist, which the Church calls the "source and summit of the Christian life," we receive Jesus Christ Himself— body, blood, soul, and divinity.

Finally, in prayer we communicate with God and share our heart with Him. We need time to pray each day if we want to grow spiritually. The soul needs prayer like the body needs oxygen. To be filled more with Christ's life, we need to take in what Pope Francis has called "the deep breath of prayer." When we make daily prayer a priority, our lives are better. We are reminded of our identity as children of a

good Father in heaven, and all that we do — our work, relationships, responsibilities — is enriched with Christ's Spirit. Rather than relying on our own abilities, efforts and plans, it will be Christ radiating through us, filling us with the grace to live life in ways that are much more fulfilling than we could gain on our own.

These four practices of prayer, fellowship, the sacraments and the Apostles' teaching are like the fuel we can add to keep the fire of our faith growing. The more we live out these four things, the more we will encounter Jesus ever anew in the life of His Church.

#### ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND

##### **Sonship/Partakers of the Divine Nature (CCC 2009, 460):**

Filial adoption, in making us partakers by grace in the divine nature, can bestow true merit on us as a result of God's gratuitous justice. This is our right by grace, the full right of love, making us "co-heirs" with Christ and worthy of obtaining "the promised inheritance of eternal life." The merits of our good works are gifts of the divine goodness. "Grace has gone before us; now we are given what is due. . . . Our merits are God's gifts." The Word became flesh to make us "partakers of the divine nature": "For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God." "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." "The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods."

##### **Sanctifying Grace (CCC 2000):**

Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love. Habitual grace, the permanent disposition to live and act in keeping with God's call, is distinguished from actual graces which refer to God's interventions, whether at the beginning of conversion or in the course of the work of sanctification.

##### **Apostolic Succession (CCC 77):**

In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them their own position of teaching authority." Indeed, "the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time."

##### **Acts 2:42 and the Catechism of the Catholic Church:**

These four practices of discipleship are so foundational that they give the structure of the modern Catechism of the Catholic Church. Part 1: The Profession of Faith (the Apostles Teaching); Part 2: The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Sacraments), Part 3: Life in Christ (Fellowship); Part 4: Christian Prayer (Prayer). An in depth study of the Catechism, then, provides an excellent opportunity for growth in these four biblical practices.



DISCUSSION

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

*Passage: 2 Corinthians 3:18, 1 John 3:1-2, 2 Peter 1:4, Luke 10:16, Acts 2:42*

### Introduction

1. Can you recall a time in your life when you underwent a true, positive transformation? What caused it?

*Please read aloud:* Last session, we discussed how by his death on the Cross, Jesus frees humanity from their sins and bridges the gap between a fallen humanity and the all holy God. Yet, the Father loves us so much that he wants more than merely a repaired, just, peaceful coexisting relationship with us.

This is why Jesus doesn't just die on the cross, He also rises from the dead to give us new life! He then sends his Spirit into our hearts so that we can be transformed in Him and become God's sons and daughters, sharing in His very divine life and love forever.

### Transformation and Divine Sonship

*Read 2 Corinthians 3:18*

2. How does this passage give us a deeper understanding of what God is offering us in Christ? What more is being offered than a mere forgiveness of sin?

*Answer: Christ doesn't only want to save us from sin; he wants to transform us, make us like him, and change us "into his likeness".*

*Please read aloud:* Christ doesn't merely wish to save us, but to transform us. Curtis Martin explains how the early Church spoke about this transformation:

Imagine a cold steel bar and a hot burning fire. They have almost nothing in common. If you place the cold rod in the hot fire, though, something amazing begins to happen: The rod begins to take on the properties of the fire. It grows warm, it begins to glow—and if you were to take the rod out of the fire and touch it to some straw, it could actually start a fire itself. Now image that the fire is God and we are the steel rod. When we are living in Christ...we begin to take on the properties of God.<sup>1</sup>

3. What does it mean that we can "begin to take on the properties of God?"

*Answer: As Christ fills us with his life, we begin to think like Christ, serve like Christ, sacrifice like Christ. We take on the virtues of Christ: we become more patient, honest, generous, pure, and courageous like Christ. We can begin to say with St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).*

*Please read aloud:* This transformation in Christ is truly amazing! But, there's still even more to what Christ offers us. Let's read a couple more passages.

*Note to leader: Have two members of your group each look up a passage and read it aloud.*

*Read 1 John 3:1-2 and 2 Peter 1:4*

4. What do these passages tell us about what Christ offers?

*Answers:*

*For 1 John 3:1-2: Note how St. John doesn't say we are merely called God's children. We are called children of God because that is what we really become! Because Christ's Spirit, the divine life of the Son of God himself dwells in our hearts, we are truly sons and daughters, and we can truly call God Father! In fact, when the Bible describes how God is our Father, we are God's children, and we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, these are not pious metaphors. Through baptism, we really share in Christ's divine life—the life of the Eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, dwells within us.*

*For 2 Peter 1:4: St. Peter explicitly states that we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) — we begin taking on the character of Christ. The very divine life of the Son of God fills us and makes us God's children. We become "sons in the Son." And that life of Christ within us is like the hot fire of his love changing the metal rod of our fallen human nature.*

*Please read aloud:* From these passages, we can see that, when God sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross, he didn't do so merely to save us from sin. He sent his Son because he wants to fill us with his divine life and adopt us as his children. And he doesn't just want to forgive us. He wants to transform us — to heal our wounded human nature, perfect it and elevate it to share in his total, infinite, supernatural love, so that we take on the character of Christ (Philippians 3:21, Romans

12). He doesn't want to restore us to Eden, a mere earthly paradise, he wants to invite us to the everlasting perfect paradise of heaven.

5. After discussing all that Christ offers us, what stands out to you the most? And what does all of this mean for you personally?

*Allow the group to discuss*

### **Transformation in the Heart of the Church**

*Please Read Aloud:* The profound transformation that Christ wants to accomplish in our hearts is breathtaking. But where does it take place? The answer is that this transformation takes place in and through Christ's Church.

While it may be tempting to make the Church an appendix - a minor detail in the life of the disciple - that is not what Christ intended. It is primarily through the Church that God wishes to accomplish His sanctifying work in us. The Church Father St. Cyprian reminds us that "No one can have God for his Father, who does not have the Church for his mother."<sup>2</sup> Jesus himself established the Church so that people throughout the ages could come to know him and his plan for our lives.

*Read Luke 10:16*

6. What authority does Christ give to his apostles in this verse?

*Answer: Christ gives the apostles authority to speak on his behalf, he even equates rejecting the words and teachings of the apostles with rejecting both himself and God the Father.*

*Please read aloud:* Christ gave incredible authority to his apostles. Yet even more significant for us today is the reality that this authority didn't end with the apostles, but was handed on to the Apostles' successors, the bishops, throughout the centuries to the present moment. The early Church was so serious about the this connection between Christ and His Church that St. Ignatius of Antioch - a disciple of St. John the Apostle - would write that "apart from [priests, bishops, and deacons], there is no Church."<sup>3</sup>

7. Take a moment right now and feel the weight of what this means. If to reject the apostles was to reject Christ, and the authority of the apostles now resides in the bishops of the Catholic Church to this day, what does this mean for us personally?

*Answer: It means that to the extent we knowingly reject the bishops and the Catholic Church, we are also distancing ourselves from Jesus. That's why it's crucial for Christians to follow Jesus faithfully within the Church, guarding the "deposit of faith" and not to holding a "counterfeit faith" based on our own opinions or the popular whims of the world (2 Tim 3:8).*

*Please read aloud:* All that Jesus won for us in his death and resurrection comes to us through the Catholic Church. It is through the Church that we experience the transformation of mind and heart that we are made for as beloved sons and daughters of God. But how do we do this today?

To answer this question, it's helpful to look at the life of the disciples in the book of Acts to see how the very first Christian converts lived.

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<sup>3</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Trallians*, 3. To understand more about the nature of the Church and how the Catholic Church is revealed in Scripture, see chapter 7

*Read Acts 2:42*

8. What four things were the early Christian's "devoting themselves" to?

*Answer: The apostles' teaching, fellowship, "the breaking of the bread," and prayer.*

*Please read aloud:* We can think of these four key practices of a disciple — prayer, fellowship, the breaking of the bread (i.e., the sacraments) and the teaching of the Apostles — as the channels through which we encounter Christ in His Church and experience transformation. Let's consider these practices.

*(Optional) Note to the leader: Use a whiteboard or a piece of paper and divide it into four quadrants, labeled: Apostles Teaching, Fellowship, Sacraments, Prayer. As you go through each of the four practices, write out the ways in which we can practically live out each practice with your group. Consider assigning a different "scribe" for each practice.*

9. What do you know about these practices? What are some practical ways to live them out? *(Note to the leader: Make sure that your group gets to spend at least a little time discussing each of the four practices)*

*Allow the group to discuss. The following considerations may be helpful for your discussion:*

*Apostles Teaching: In learning the teachings of the Church, we ponder aspects of the faith that stir us to praise or challenges us to make a sacrifice. We are "transformed by the renewal of our minds" (cf. Rom 12:1-2). Examples: Reading the Catechism of the Catholic Church,*

