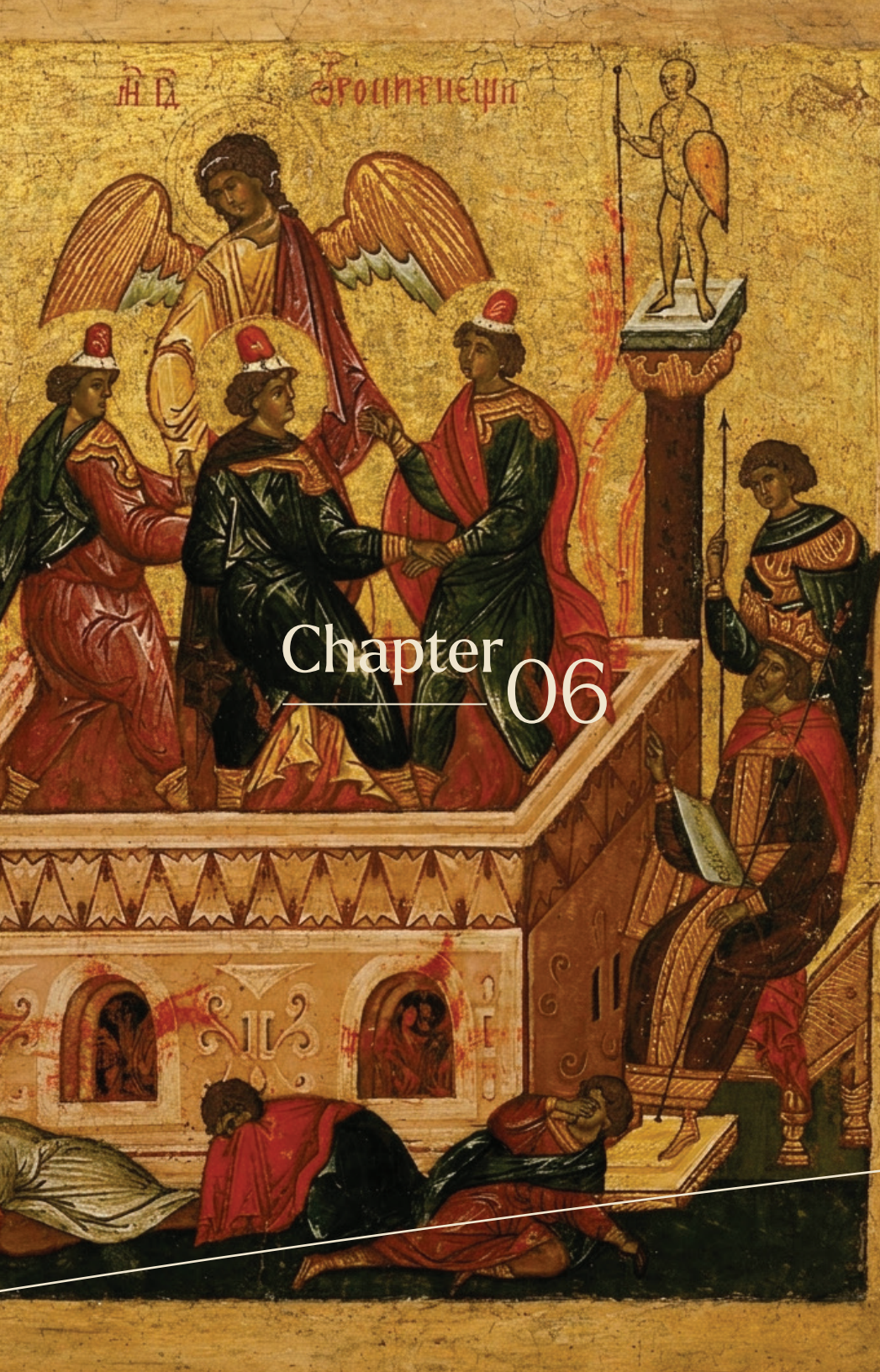




Chapter 06

Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael & Faith

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UNDERSTANDING

What do I need to know about this passage?

Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael must have seen their lives flash before their eyes as the guards led them to their death. They had refused to worship the king's golden statue, and now they were about to pay the ultimate price. Before them raged the fire of a furnace and these three men were walking straight into its flames. Can you imagine willingly facing such a harrowing death? Why would they do such a thing?

Were the three Israelites simply rebels who refused to obey a foreign king? Stubborn criminals who cared little for the law? To many, they probably looked like lunatics, for only insane men would defy the king, without regard for their lives. But they were none of these things. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael were men who believed in the God of Israel.

Believers today rightly understand the concept of faith as belief in what cannot be seen. Even those who are not Christian often claim to have faith in science or humanity, because making sense of life often requires belief in what is not readily

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visible. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael offer us a powerful example of faith in God, because they saw reality from His perspective. They trusted God with their very lives, no matter where it led.

The story of Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael has become one of the most recognized narratives from the Old Testament, but this drama reveals so much more than what we might immediately notice. Their experience reveals divine mysteries that can only be fully understood when seen with the eyes of faith.

Faith enables us to believe in God and see reality as it truly is, to see God moving both in the monotony of our daily lives and in the big, crescendo moments when He reveals Himself clearly. Let's dive into this amazing story to learn how to live the theological virtue of faith in moments both big and small.

Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael

Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael were proud descendants of King David. As young men, they were taken captive to Babylon and forced to serve King Nebuchadnezzar. Upon their arrival, they were given the pagan names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to erase their Jewish identity and force

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them to assimilate into Babylonian culture.¹ Despite all this, the three men remained faithful to God.

Years later, King Nebuchadnezzar commands the people to bow down and worship his new golden statue. The three men refuse. When the king hears of their rejection, he is enraged and gives them an ultimatum: worship the statue or burn in a fiery furnace.

Amazingly, these men reply,

O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up (Dan 3:16–18).

When the king hears of their defiance, he orders the furnace's heat to be increased seven-fold. The three young men are bound and led to their death.

¹ Hananiah means "The Lord is gracious." His new name, Shadrach means, "command of the moon god (Aku). Mishael means "Who is like God?" His new name Meshach, means "who is Aku." Azariah means "The Lord is my help." His new name, Abednego means, "servant of Nebo." The renaming signified an attempt to erase their covenant identity and assimilate them into Babylonian culture.

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But in the fiery furnace, the three men walk upright, untouched by the flames. Realizing that God is preserving them, they sing a litany of praise among the flames, exhorting everything in the heavens and on the earth to "bless the Lord" (Dan 3:52–90).

Nebuchadnezzar witnesses the miracle and is amazed. He asks, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" (3:24). The servants say it is true, and Nebuchadnezzar replies, "But I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods" (Dan 3:25).

Imagine how King Nebuchadnezzar must have felt. Did he believe any god he worshipped could display such power?

King Nebuchadnezzar calls to the men to come out, praising the true God of Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael. He recognizes that his golden statue is nothing compared to the God of Israel, and that he is no more than a mere mortal. He then declares that no other god can save in this way, commanding that no one say anything against the God of Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael.

Growing up, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael had learned of God's saving power. They knew God had delivered them out of Egypt, given them manna

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in the desert, and helped them enter the land of Canaan. Their faith was formed by God's repeated revelation of Himself in the law, the prophets, the Scriptures, and His marvelous works of salvation. They believed in God and boldly attested to that belief in a culture that did not know Him.

These three faithful friends challenge us to follow in their footsteps. Let's learn about the virtue of faith and discover how the Holy Spirit wants to renew our minds and transform the way we live and witness to God in our lives.

Faith

There is more to reality than meets the eye. That's why the invisible God has revealed Himself to us. He wants us to "see" Him and understand His created world so that we can know Him, love Him, and find our happiness in Him. Our proper response to this divine self-revelation is called faith, "the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief" (CCC 1814). Faith is not a feeling. Nor is it an unreasonable "blind leap." Rather, faith is a gift, given to us by God in Baptism, that allows us to know and believe in the ultimate Truth, Christ Himself (CCC 157).

We need God's help to see reality clearly—our lives, our relationships, and the world around us.

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Because of the effects of sin, we don't always see things accurately. Our minds have been darkened, and, as a result, we tend not to see God, the world, or ourselves properly. Our wills are also weakened, making choosing the good difficult. And our emotions sometimes take over and cloud our perception of what is best. As a result, we can be tempted to value other things—money, success, popularity, etc.—too much, perhaps even more than we value God. While these passing things can be good and support human flourishing, they can never offer us the salvation, fulfillment, joy, and peace that can only be found in God.

Faith, however, enlightens our darkened minds and frees us to see everything with greater clarity, to know God as our ultimate end—the source of our happiness—and to see all the other things in this world in light of Him and His good plan for us. Said simply, "faith is the healing of our minds."² The faithful man is able to see reality as God sees it, which means seeing what truly is: God, heaven and hell, Saints and angels, the dignity of mankind, the reality of the human soul, the consequences of sin, the fruits of holiness, the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, the forgiveness of sin in confession, and Jesus's real presence in the Eucharist.

²Habinger Institute for Catholic Leadership, *True Leadership*, Sophia Consulting, LLC 2015. Cluny Media Edition, 2018. p. 44.

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Faith has two aspects. First, by faith, we accept as true all the teachings of Christ in Scripture and Tradition. Indeed, Christ is truth itself (Jn 14:6). He cannot and does not lie. And He sent the Holy Spirit to lead His Church into “all truth” (Jn 16:13, see 1 Tim 3:5).

The second aspect goes one step further. By faith, we not only accept these teachings as true, but we believe in God Who has revealed them and entrust ourselves wholly to Him. In the words of the Catechism, faith is a “personal adherence of man to God” (CCC 150). By faith, we give ourselves to God, trusting in Him and what He has revealed to us.

Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael give us a beautiful example of this kind of faith. Not only do they have a deep understanding of what God revealed—“O Lord, God of Fathers...all your judgments are true”—but they also entrusted themselves fully to God, saying, “And now with all our hearts we follow you, we fear you and seek your face” as they walked into the fire (Dan 3:26–27, 3:18).

These three young friends show us an incredible example of faith in the God of Israel, but we, as Christians, have access to something even more amazing: the theological virtue of faith. This type of faith goes beyond our natural human capacities and is infused into our souls by the power of the Holy

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Spirit in baptism. Theological faith enlightens our minds even more profoundly and unites us to God in a most intimate way, allowing us to participate in His own divine life—something beyond what Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael experienced.

Are we willing to take advantage of this gift of faith in Baptism? Are we willing to learn to see the universe with the eyes of faith? And are we willing to stake our entire lives on our belief in God?

Sometimes, we may find the first aspect of faith easier. We read a book or listen to a podcast and simply agree or assent to God and what He has revealed. However, it is much more difficult to surrender and entrust ourselves to His plan. But for faith to be complete, it must inform how we speak, act, and think about the many details of daily life: our work, our leisure, how we spend our time, how we treat the people around us, how we relate to God and put that faith into practice.

Therefore, we need to grow in both aspects of faith. First, the Church teaches us that “it is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith and to understand better what He has revealed.” (CCC 158) Are we actively developing our knowledge of the faith? When we encounter something, we don’t understand, do we ask questions, get more

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information, or seek answers in Scripture or the Catechism? Do we allow Christ to constantly form our minds so that we can take on the “mind of Christ?” (1 Cor 2:16). Are we seeking to know God more intimately through prayer and the sacraments?

Secondly, we must also grow in entrusting every aspect of our lives to God and the truth He has revealed. If we believe, for example, in the power of Confession, do we receive this sacrament frequently? If we understand Christ’s teaching about money, do we give generously through tithing and almsgiving? If we accept the truth that God loves us deeply, do we treat ourselves and the people around us as beloved by God? If we believe in the truth of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, do we remain constant in attending Sunday—or even daily—Mass? If we accept what God has revealed about sexuality, do we practice chastity according to our state in life? If we believe in the bliss of heaven and the tragedy of hell, are we also eager to share Christ with others, so that they too might experience eternal life?

The miracle of the fiery furnace challenges us to follow Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael’s example. Not only does faith involve genuine belief, but it also invites us to allow that faith to transform every aspect of our lives, including the ways we think, the ways we act, and the ways we serve God and others.

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Application: Witness

The gift of faith cannot be kept to oneself. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael didn’t only tell King Nebuchadnezzar about God’s power like a classroom teacher, they also witnessed to it with their lives. The Church teaches that a “disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it and spread it” (CCC 1816). Similarly, St. Thomas Aquinas taught that the virtue of faith naturally leads to external expressions of that faith, particularly confessing it before others.³

Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael model this witness for us. Although they lived in ancient times, Babylonian culture is not so different than our own. The people of Babylon didn’t see the world around them clearly. They worshipped and sacrificed to many different gods, hoping the gods would exalt them in return. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael saw beyond the idolatry of their day and lived counterculturally because they had a better vision; they saw the world more clearly. They were willing to die for that vision and give “supreme witness to the truth” (CCC 2473). But they also show us that being a witness requires many smaller acts of faithfulness as well. For them,

³Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Online Edition, II-II, Q. 3, art. 1. Accessed at <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3003.htm> March, 5 2026.

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being a faithful witness meant not only rejecting the religion of the day, but also boldly proclaiming God's name in the public square. Before bodily suffering, faithfulness meant enduring ridicule, rejection, and being singled out for their belief.

Today, being faithful witnesses will require us to live counterculturally as well. Although we don't worship golden statues, a quick glance at billboards, commercials, and the conversations trending on social media reveals that we have idols too and still struggle to understand the world as it truly is. Being a witness requires that we resist the many cultural pressures we face, such as sexual license, substance abuse, watching pornography, chasing an extravagant lifestyle, lying, gossip, or even those mundane behaviors that are counterexamples to a Christian witness: mindlessly scrolling, failing to give others our time and attention, or simply living mediocre lives.

Being a bold and faithful witness also has a positive dimension. God calls us not only to resist the errors in our culture, but He also invites us to live in ways that demonstrate the reality of what we profess. This might include embracing Christ's teaching in our personal lives: developing a prayer life, studying the Scriptures, being faithful to our vocation, receiving the sacraments, being generous with our money, or growing in character so that the

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love, kindness, and generosity of Christ can be seen in us. It might also mean directly witnessing to Christ in our communities: inviting friends and family to church, bible study, or confession; sharing the Gospel; engaging in local pro-life work; caring for the poor; or helping those with addiction.

Pope Paul VI said,

“Above all, the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness.”⁴ The story of the three men and the fiery furnace is ultimately the story of the power of faith. If God can reveal His glory and bring forth His miracles through the faithful witness of three ordinary men, He can do it in our lives as well.

⁴ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, par. 21

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DISCUSSION

Daniel 3:1-7
 Daniel 3:8-23
 Daniel 3:24-30 (RSVCE)
 or
 Daniel 3:91-97 (NAB)

Discussion guide for your Bible study

01. Launching Question: Have you ever been sure of something only to find out later that you “had it all wrong”?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud:

In this study, we are going to talk about seeing reality clearly. The virtue that allows us to do this is faith. Many people rightly understand faith as a belief in the unseen. Even those who are not Christian claim to have a kind of faith in science or humanity because making sense of life often requires belief in what is not always immediately apparent. But what exactly is the theological virtue of faith? How could it change the way we think, act, and live?

Share a brief introduction to the theological virtue of faith (“the virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us”; not a feeling and not an unreasonable “blind leap”). Refer to CCC 1814.

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To explore this virtue in depth, we turn to the story of Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, recounted in the book of Daniel—a story so sensational that it has become one of the most recognized narratives from the Old Testament. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael were proud descendants of King David. As young men, they were taken captive to Babylon and forced to serve King Nebuchadnezzar. Upon their arrival, they were given the pagan names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to erase their Jewish identity and force them to assimilate into Babylonian culture.¹ Let’s explore their story:

Read Daniel 3:1-7

02. What does the King command the leaders of his people to do? How do they respond?

Answer: The King commands that all the leaders of his lands bow down and worship before a golden idol of his creation. In response, the leaders obey without question.

03. Based on the King’s command, what is being presented as true?

¹ Hananiah means “The Lord is gracious.” His new name, Shadrach means, “command of the moon god (Aku).” Mishael means “Who is like God?” His new name Meshach, means “who is Aku.” Azariah means “The Lord is my help.” His new name, Abednego means, “servant of Nebo.” The renaming signified an attempt to erase their covenant identity and assimilate them into Babylonian culture.

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Allow the group to discuss.

Answers may include: The “truth” on offer is that this idol, made by men, is a god worthy of being worshipped. The beat of the music, the peer pressure of a whole nation, and the promise of power compel the officials to obey this unreasonable act of worship.

Please read aloud:

While it’s unlikely that we are going to be forced to bow down to a physical idol in our time, the temptation to idolatry—placing faith in something that is not God—is alive and well. Our minds have been darkened. As a result, we can be tempted to value other things—money, success, popularity, etc.—too much, perhaps even more than we value God. While these passing things can be good and support human flourishing, they can never offer us the salvation, fulfillment, joy, and peace that can only be found in God.

04. What are some ways that you’ve been personally tempted to value other things more than you value God?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud:

Let’s now look at how Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael respond to this temptation.

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Read Daniel 3:8–23

05. How do the young men respond to the king’s threat?

Answer: They refuse to bow down to the king’s idol, even if it means death.

Please read aloud:

Faith has two aspects. First, we accept as true all that has been revealed by God. The second aspect goes one step further. By faith, we not only accept certain teachings as true, but believe in God with our whole being. In doing so, “man freely commits his entire self to God.”²

06. In what ways do Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael both believe in God and what He has revealed? In what ways do they “commit their entire selves” to God?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answers may include: The three young men believe both in God and what he revealed to Israel in the 1st commandment (“You shall not have any strange gods before me”). Beyond simply knowing this commandment, they live it, refusing to bow down to an idol, despite the threat of death.

² *Dei Verbum*, par. 5

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Please read aloud:

“Faith is the healing of our mind.”³ It allows us to see things with clarity—to know God as our ultimate end and other things in the world in light of Him. When we practice the virtue of faith, we gain “eternal perspective.” We see reality as God sees it.

07. Because of their faith, what realities do Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael see that others do not?

Answer: The three young men can see past the noise of the visible world around them (threats, peer and cultural pressure, promises of power and prestige). They see that God is real, He alone is worthy of worship, and that death is far better than to bow down to an idol.

Please read aloud:

Although some think of faith as “blind belief,” true faith is grounded in reason and allows us to remain reasonable when those around us are falling into error.

08. How is the faith of Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael grounded in reason? In what ways do they remain more reasonable than those around them?

³Habinger Institute for Catholic Leadership, *True Leadership*, Sophia Consulting, LLC 2015. Cluny Media Edition, 2018. p. 44.

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Allow the group to discuss.

Answers may include: The faith of these young men is grounded in the true history of their people, whom God saved and brought out of slavery. It’s far more reasonable to believe in this God than Nebuchadnezzar’s god. It’s unreasonable to worship a statue made by men, even if everyone else is going along with it. Because of their faith, the three young men not only cling to God, they also remain fully sane.

Please read aloud:

These three young friends show us an incredible example of faith in the God of Israel, but we, as Christians, have access to something even more amazing: the theological virtue of faith, which goes beyond our natural human capacities and is infused into our souls, enlightening our minds to see reality even more profoundly.

09. How is the theological virtue of faith superior to the faith of Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael? Empowered by this gift, what elements of idolatry are we called to reject as the three young men did? In what ways have you personally done so?

Allow the group to discuss.

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Answer: While Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael knew much of the God's revelation in the Old Testament, God reveals Himself most fully in Jesus Christ. In Christ, we can see God's plan and the truth about reality with even greater clarity and completeness.

Please read aloud:

Let's continue the story.

Read Daniel 3:24–30 (RSVCE) or 3:91–97 (NAB)⁴

10. What ends up happening to the young men? How does the king react?

Answer: God hears the prayers of the young men and spares their lives, rendering the flames unable to hurt them. The king declares the God of Israel “blessed” and decrees that anyone who speaks against the God of Israel is to be punished. In short, their witness leads to the king's belief in God.

Please read aloud:

Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael's story is powerful because they didn't just tell King Nebuchadnezzar about God's power like a teacher, they witnessed to it. The Church instructs us, “The disciple

⁴ Different versions of the Bible have different verse numbers for the same text.

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of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it and spread it” (CCC 1816). Jesus likewise warns us in the Gospel, “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 10:32).

11. Why is it so important for us to witness to the faith in addition to proclaiming it in words?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer:**Please read aloud:**

Being a bold and faithful witness also requires pursuing holiness in our personal and public life. It requires that we live both counterculturally and that we demonstrate the truth about what we believe.

12. How are you witnessing to Christ and a life of holiness in the face of the many idols in today's culture? In what ways would you still like to grow?

Allow the group to discuss. Consider using **Acts 2:42** (Prayer, Fellowship, Sacraments,

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Teachings of the Church) to help categorize various areas of discipleship to pursue.

Answers may include: Developing a prayer life, reading the scriptures, participating in the sacraments, battling our interior struggle with sin, service in our communities, inviting others to mass, bible studies or confession, prolife work, care for the poor or those fighting addiction.

Please read aloud:

Pope Paul VI said, “Above all, the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness.”⁵ The story of the three men and the fiery furnace is ultimately the story of the power of faith. If God can reveal His glory and bring forth His miracles through the faithful witness of three ordinary men, He can do it in our lives as well.

⁵ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, par. 21

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