3.0

"IN THE DUST OF THE RABBI"

LIVING AS A DISCIPLE OF JESUS

Optional *Lectio Divina* Prayer

1. Read Luke 5:1–11.
2. Meditate on the words.
3. Speak to Christ about this passage.
4. Rest and listen in God's presence.
5. Discuss together.

Notes

It's astonishing that, of the thousands of Jewish people living in his day, Jesus chose a man like Simon Peter to be his disciple.

Peter did not come with an impressive résumé. He did not stand out as one of the smartest or holiest or most gifted or most talented people of his time, nor did he hold any position of leadership among the Jews. He was not a priest. He wasn't part of the elite ruling class. He wasn't a religious expert like the Pharisees. He was just an ordinary, uneducated fisherman working on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

And it's clear from the Gospels that Peter was far from perfect. He does exhibit some moments of great faith, but he's also known for making big mistakes and overestimating his abilities, like misunderstanding Jesus (Mt 16:22), limiting forgiveness (Mt 18:21), and lacking in trust (Mt 14:30). Peter even denies Jesus three times and abandons him in his greatest hour of need (Mt 26:75).

Peter was an ordinary person like us — someone who had good intentions but didn't have it all together — and yet, Jesus still called him to be his disciple. And Peter's life was transformed through this process of discipleship: He eventually became a great Christian leader, a holy saint, a courageous witness to Christ, and even a martyr in Rome.

That gives us great encouragement. God loves and chooses us just as we are, but he loves us too much to let us stay there. It's the call to follow him that comes first, before the expectation to do great things. And if we answer the call, he will heal us and equip us to live as his disciples. If Jesus can take weak, imperfect, far-from-holy men like Peter and transform them over time into saints, he certainly can do the same with us.

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DISCUSS

Does knowing that Peter was not necessarily the most gifted and talented person in the world encourage you? In what ways have you had good intentions to be who Jesus was calling you to be, but failed?

DISCIPLES OF JESUS: IMITATING THE MASTER[1]

The idea of discipleship can be summed up with one biblical key word: *imitation.* To be a disciple meant you were following a rabbi, a teacher. But the goal of a disciple wasn't merely to master the rabbi's teachings; instead, it was to master his way of life: how he prayed, studied, taught, served the poor, and lived out his relationship with God day to day.

Jesus himself said that, when a disciple is fully trained, he becomes "like his teacher" (Lk 6:40). When St. Paul formed disciples, he exhorted them not just to remember his teachings but also to follow his way of living: "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). He exhorted them to lead others in the same way (2 Tm 2:2).

The word the Bible uses for "disciple" is *mathetes*, which means "learner." But biblical discipleship is very different from the kind

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of classroom learning that takes place on most college campuses today. A university professor might deliver lectures in a large hall, and students would later be tested on how well they mastered the material they received. Occasionally, a student might ask a question and seek more guidance. But for the most part, professors and students usually don't share life together in an ongoing community of fellowship and learning outside the classroom.

Learning from a rabbi, however, was very different. As Edward Sri explains,

> To follow a rabbi … meant living with the rabbi, sharing life with him and taking part in the rabbi's whole way of life. A disciple might accompany a rabbi on all his daily routines: prayer, study, debating other rabbis, giving alms to the poor, burying the dead, going to court, etc. A rabbi's life was meant to be a living example of someone shaped by God's Word. Disciples, therefore, studied not just the text of Scripture but also the "text" of the rabbi's life.[2]

This is why Jesus didn't simply invite his disciples to listen to his preaching in the synagogues. He said, "Come, follow me," and basically invited them on a three-year camping trip, traveling from village to village throughout Galilee as he was preaching the Gospel of the kingdom.

Think about that: living with Jesus, day in and day out, for three years! How much his disciples would have been influenced by his example! They'd notice the way he woke up early to pray. They'd witness his compassion toward others. They'd be moved by his urgent need to go out to sinners and outcasts. They'd see miracles of healing and resurrection. They'd also witness how he taught the crowds, debated opponents, called people to repentance and offered them his mercy. Much of Jesus' way of living would have "rubbed off" on his disciples.

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DISCUSS

How does this idea of discipleship change the way you think about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus?

OUR DISCIPLESHIP TODAY

While we're called to follow all the doctrines and practices of the Faith, much more is needed. We must go deeper and reflect upon what is happening in our hearts. Are we growing in our union with Jesus? Do we notice his ongoing call to conversion, his prompting in us to give more, love more, and surrender more? Disciples are aware that Jesus is constantly inviting them to live more like him in all areas of their lives — as Pope St. John Paul II said, "to think like him, to judge like him, to act in conformity with his commandments, and to hope as he invites us to."[4] Being a disciple, therefore, entails a lot more than simply saying and believing the right things. It's an entire way of life. It's ultimately Jesus' way of life transforming us.

This theme of discipleship reminds us that being Catholic is not something stagnant: "I attend Mass on Sundays"; "I believe all the Church's teachings." All that, of course, is essential for a practicing Catholic; but living as a disciple involves so much more. Discipleship is something intensely personal and dynamic. It entails ongoing conversion, transformation, and continually learning to say a greater "Yes" to Jesus. The true disciple of Jesus is never just going through the motions. They never settle for mediocrity, for the bare minimum, for a "check-the-box" approach to faith. Rather, true disciples are striving for greatness, always on the lookout for the next step of faith to which God is calling them. They are intentionally aiming to root out sins and weaknesses in their life, to grow in new virtues and to deepen their friendship with Christ. They're intentionally trying to imitate Christ.

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This journey of transformation involves a disciple humbly recognizing two important truths:

A. **"The truth about himself—**his many weaknesses, failures, and areas where he falls short of living like Christ

B. **The truth about what he's made for—**being conformed to the image of Christ: living like him, loving like him ...

Discipleship is all about moving from A to B."[5]

When the Catholic tradition speaks about "pursuing sanctity" or "becoming holy," it's referring to this lifelong process of a Christian disciple being ever more transformed by God's grace and changed into Christ's likeness "from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3:18).

DISCUSS

In what ways are you already living as a disciple of Jesus, and in what ways do you see yourself falling short?

LIVING AS A DISCIPLE: FOUR PRACTICES

The ancient Jews had a saying that captures this idea of discipleship and transformation. They said that if you find a good rabbi, you should "cover yourself in the dust of his feet and drink in his words thirstily." Sri goes on to explain:

> The expression probably draws on a well-known sight for ancient Jews: disciples were known for walking behind their rabbi, following him so closely that they would become covered with the dust kicked up from his sandals. This would have been a powerful image for what should happen in the disciple's life spiritually. Disciples were

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> expected to follow the rabbi so closely that they would be covered with their master's whole way of thinking, living and acting.[6]

Thousands of years later, we're called to do the same. Though we walk on paved roads, not dusty ones, we are still called to be disciples — to follow our Rabbi, Jesus Christ, so closely that we are covered by the "dust" of his life, that we are changed and made new. These are exactly the kind of disciples that Jesus is looking for. He calls us to imitate him.

But how can we do that today?

The early disciples sought to imitate the life Jesus taught them in four ways: "[T]hey 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 Jesus' guidance and power today, just like in the early Church. They will help us to grow spiritually far beyond what we could ever do 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 and coat ourselves in the dust of our Rabbi. For example:

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> [W]e ponder an aspect of the apostolic faith that stirs us to praise or challenges us to make a sacrifice. This helps us become more like Christ. We sense in prayer God calling us to change, be better in a certain area or trust him more. We experience his love and mercy in the sacraments and long to come back again. We encounter Jesus in fellowship with 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.[7]

DISCUSS

Looking at these four practices (prayer, fellowship, the sacraments, and the apostles' teaching), what steps do you need to take to be better "covered in the dust" of your Rabbi, Jesus Christ?

TAKE ACTION

Now that you've learned what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, you can begin taking some concrete steps toward becoming a more faithful disciple. Focus especially on how you can draw closer to Christ by making the four practices of Acts 2:42 a greater part of your life. The next several articles in this book can be helpful guides for learning how to incorporate these four practices in your daily life.

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KEY CONCEPTS

Imitation: One key word that sums up the life of a disciple is "imitation." A disciple should be "covered in the dust of the Rabbi," constantly striving to imitate Christ.

In Acts 2:42, the four practices of a disciple of Jesus are

1. Prayer
2. Fellowship
3. The breaking of the bread
4. The teaching of the apostles.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Into His Likeness: Be Transformed as a Disciple of Christ by Dr. Edward Sri

The Activated Disciple by Jeff Cavins

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1805–1845 : "The Human Virtues"

Notes:

[1] The following sections of this article are based on insights from Edward Sri, *Into His Likeness: Be Transformed as a Disciple* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017).

[2] Edward Sri, *Into His Likeness: Be Transformed as a Disciple* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 25.

[3] Ibid., 29.

[4] John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, accessed September 25, 2020, Vatican.va, 20.

[5] Edward Sri, *Into His Likeness: Be Transformed as a Disciple*, 5.

[6] Ibid., 30.

[7] Edward Sri, "In the Dust of the Rabbi: Clarifying Discipleship for Faith Formation Today," *Review. catechetics.com,* accessed November 18, 2020, https://review.catechetics.com/dust-rabbi-clarifying-discipleship-faith-formation-today.

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