

RCIA CLASS 6 - 8 – JESUS CHRIST, TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN, THE SAVING MYSETERY OF OUR REDEMPTION

I. Human nature, as with all the universe, was made good, but is fallen.

A. As Genesis 1 emphasizes, God made all things, including humanity good. See also Wis. 11:23-26.

1. Men and women were made to be in the image and likeness of God. Of all things in the material realm, we are the most like God. See Gen. 1:26-27; Ps. 8:5-9.

2. There was at creation original justice, which involved, among other things, a harmony of nature with humanity, an ease at prayer and friendship with God, the ability to do what is right easily, and a body not subject to death and decay.

B. The Fall of Man marred that original justice and introduced disorder into the world and into human nature.

1. The world became fallen and rebelled at least in part against humanity and became disordered. See Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 8:19-22; See Catechism 400.

2. Worse than that, the sin of Adam and Eve introduced original sin into human nature. Original sin is that break from God that in turn causes us to be flawed and act in a manner that is flawed. See, e.g., Catechism 402-406, 418; Psalm 14:1-3. Among the effects of original sin are:

a. Our will is weakened by concupiscence, the difficulty in doing what is right, which is largely due to the fact that passions and desire are no longer fully under control. See, e.g., Rom. 7:14-25.

b. On a related point, there is a difficulty at prayer. In general, we no longer sense God as present to us as Adam and Eve did. See, e.g., Rom. 8:26; Catechism 2725.

c. This separation from God also causes a weakness of will and darkness of intellect that leads to a difficulty in thinking clearly especially about the most important things. See Catechism 405; St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Part II-I, question 85, article 3.

d. Furthermore, due to the separation from God and the flaws introduced into the natural realm, the human body became subject to death and decay. God allowed this death and decay both to warn humanity about the need to repent and to place a limit on the evils people could do. See Gen. 3:22.

e. Supernatural death, the inability to be with God in heaven, was the worst consequence of sin, for nothing impure can enter into heaven. See, e.g., Rev. 21:27. The subjection to physical death and decay is a visible sign, warning us of this deeper flaw. See Rom. 5:12-24; Cf. Luke 15:32 (describing being apart from God as “death.”)

C. Personal sins, also called actual sins, are sins we commit personally.

1. A sin is a word, deed, thought or desire contrary to the eternal law of God. Sins upset the order that God established and thus offends against the love of God, whether intentionally or not. See Catechism 1849-50.

2. One should distinguish between evil, sin and blameworthy sin, although the former categories include the latter.

a. An evil is the absence of any good that ought to be there, whether there is moral fault or not. Thus, for example sickness, homelessness, and the like are evils even though there may be no sin attached. See Catechism 310.

b. A sin is any action, thought, word or desire contrary to God's will and thus disordered, regardless of whether the one committing the act is blameworthy. See Catechism 1849, 1871-72. Thus, for example, a desire for evil is sinful even if the person is blameless because he feels it involuntarily. Likewise, for example, if a person commits perjury for what he considers a good cause, his action is a sin, even though he may be blameless if his society has taught him that doing so is acceptable. Thus, for example, original sin is sin for us even though it is not blameworthy to us.

c. A sin is blameworthy if a person commits it freely and either knows it is wrong or should know that it is wrong. See Catechism 1734-35, 1859-60; Rom. 7:7-12. Determining culpability in individual cases is sometimes difficult and there is often some middle ground. See, e.g., Luke 12:41-58. In particular, there can be degrees of guilt when, for example, a person acts under great fear but still freely, or with ignorance that is partially his fault.

3. All sin draws us from God, and upsets the order of ourselves, society and the world. Every sin committed continues the disorder caused by original sin.

4. Although we can struggle against sins and (with the merits of Christ) help overcome their effect, we cannot cure our own sins or those of another except through Christ.

a. Because we are tainted with sin, all of our efforts to overcome sin them must be imperfect and thus not able to bring about full purity. Even overcoming the effects of sin is a bit like cleaning with a dirty towel. Cf. Is. 64:5-6.

b. Even our best efforts cannot get to the root of sin; it is too deeply buried. Cf. Ps. 14:1-3, 53:1-3. As a result, all of the efforts of the world to rid itself of sin have fallen short, even those of the ancient country of Israel, who received God's law.

- c. Furthermore, we can only give to God what He has already given to us, and thus cannot really make up the debt owed by sin. See Matt. 18:21-35; Luke 17:7-10.

D. We may not be personally guilty of original sin, but it does damage our nature. And we are guilty of actual sins committed on our own accord. We are, therefore, in need of God's mercy, both as individuals and as members of the human race. See Rom. 3:9-26.

II. From the very beginning, God promised a redemption, a promise that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

A. Right after the fall, before the punishments were given to Adam and Eve, God already promised one who would crush the serpent's head. Gen. 3:15; Catechism 411.

B. In the days before Abraham, God established a special relationship with a few people as a first promise of the restoration of all of humanity. See, e.g., Gen. 5:24, 8:20-9:17, 14:18-20; Heb. 11:1-7.

C. God began forming the Chosen People with the call to Abraham, through whom God promised a people, a land and blessings for all nations. See, e.g., Gen. 12:2-3. The relationship with God came first, and the law was then be given. See Rom. 4.

D. After freeing the Chosen People from slavery in Egypt, God gave them the law at Mount Sinai, and then continued developing the law through the prophets during Israel's history. Even to other peoples God gave the natural law, giving them in the depths of their hearts a certain understanding of what is right and wrong. See Rom. 1:18-23, 2:15.

E. However, the Chosen People never could keep the revealed law, nor could anyone else keep the natural law. Thus, the law paradoxically produced more sin, but that sin made it clear that another solution was needed. See Rom. 3:9-20, 5:12-13, 7:13; 1 Cor. 15:56; Gal 3:19-22.

F. Even in the Old Testament, there was a promise of God's cleansing power, although the precise means was not as clear. See, e.g., Ps. 51:13-14; Is. 1:18-19; Ez. 36:24-32; Zech. 13:1-2.

- As St. Pope John Paul II pointed out in his encyclical letter Dives in Misericordia (Rich in Mercy), the Old Testament used two words more than any other to describe God's mercy. One word was hesed, which reflects God's fighting determination to make His covenant work, despite all human sinfulness, and to defeat the dominance of sin and death. The other word is rahhamin, the term for mother's unconditional love of her children, the seeing of goodness in the child despite all the flaws. These terms, one masculine and the other feminine. One more objective and one more subjective, give a sense of how God's mercy works.

III. Fulfilling these promises and the longings of humanity, the Son of God became man a little over 2000 years ago. Jesus Christ was and is true God and true man.

A. Jesus Christ is God from all eternity. There was no time when the Son was not. He is a separate person from the Father and the Holy Spirit, but shares with them the Godhead in fullness, with no division.

B. At one point in time, the Father sent the Holy Spirit to make the Son a human (i.e., the divine person of the Son of God took on human nature) in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Incarnation.

1. The birth of Christ within the last two years of the reign of King Herod over Palestine. An early Church theologian Dionysus Exiguus calculated the date to be at what we now call 1 B.C., which is the basis for the current numbering of years. Early Church fathers usually favored a date from 1 B.C. – 4 B.C. See Jimmy Akin, “What Year was Jesus born”, JimmyAkin.com. Most scholarly commentaries from the 19<sup>th</sup> century have dated Herod’s death at about 4 B.C., which would indicate that Jesus was born in about 5-7 B.C. See Pope Benedict XVI, Jesus of Nazareth, Part III: The Infancy Narratives (2012) 61-61

2. The beginnings of the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John, each in its own way, all recount this fact that God became man.

C. As a human, Jesus lived (and lives still), grew in age and grace and wisdom before God and man, worked presumably as a carpenter, died upon the Cross, rose from the dead and now reigns in eternal splendor. See, e.g., Luke 2:51; Catechism 531-34. He had and has a human body and soul, a human intellect and will. See, e.g., Mark 14:36, Luke 22:42; Catechism 471-75. Jesus truly experienced emotions of happiness and sorrow, compassion and anger. See, e.g., Mark 3:5, 10:21; John 2:13-17, 11:35, 17:13; see also Luke 15:20. Jesus was like us in every way but sin, and is now glorified as we will be glorified. Heb. 4:15; see also 1 Cor. 5:20-22.

IV. The Incarnation of the Son of God joined heaven and earth together and glorified humanity.

A. The fact that the Son became man gives us the ability to share in divine nature, knowing that all aspects of human nature are joined to God. As St. Irenaeus said, “The Son of God became the Son of Man, . . . that the sons of men might become adopted sons of God.” See Against Heresies, Book III, chapter 19, section 1; Catechism 460.

- As a result, all human efforts become in a sense divinized, for they were once shared in one way or another by God who made His dwelling place among us. See John 1:14. Whatever Christ took on Christ sanctified.

- We receive the comfort that the Son of God has experienced all suffering with us. We can try to explain the mystery of human suffering, but finally the only satisfactory answer is that Jesus joined with us in our struggles. See Heb. 4:15.

B. By becoming man, Jesus showed us God’s love in visible form. As Jesus told St. Phillip, “He who sees me sees the Father.” See John 14:9.

C. Jesus showed us the perfect model of holiness in our lives. See Catechism 459. As Jesus said at the Last Supper, we are called to love one another as Christ loved us. See John 15:12. Precisely by seeing the life of Jesus and letting Him live in us, we can share in divine love.

D. It was by becoming man that Jesus saved us from our sins.

- God could have simply waived the guilt of sins, but that would have left an imbalance. It was fitting, that if the damage to humanity should come by the sin of one man, so too should salvation come from the perfect act of one man. See Rom. 5:15-21.

V. Jesus' public ministry showed the love of God and the path to heaven in various ways.

A. Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of heaven, sometimes by reiterating what was already known but in a bolder fashion (e.g., the two greatest commandments of love of God and of neighbor) and sometimes by turning worldly values upside down, as in the Beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5-7, is the most comprehensive statement of the principles of Christian life. See Catechism 1965-66.

- The parables of Jesus showed the kingdom of God in symbolic terms, emphasizing different points. Jesus sometimes used parables to make the ways of the kingdom of God clear in the rich form of literature. Jesus also expressed some things symbolically so that the crowds who could not accept the truths yet if spoken plainly would get at least some of the truth and be encouraged to enter into the mystery gradually. See, e.g., Luke 8:9-10; Catechism 546; St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica Part III, question 42, article 3.

B. Jesus showed in His public ministry God's compassion for all peoples, especially for the suffering and for the repentant. See, e.g., Matt. 9:1-13.

C. The miracles of Jesus are recorded to reflect different aspects of the kingdom of God. Thus, especially in the Gospel according to John, they are called signs, signs of a greater realm.

- Thus, for example, the turning of water into wine at Cana reflects both the new creation and the presence and blessing of Jesus (and the Blessed Virgin Mary) married couples. See John 2:1-11. And the friends who brought the lame man to Jesus are an example of bringing those who are lame in spirit to Christ and the fact that physical acts of mercy show the greater gain of forgiveness from sin. See Mark 2:1-12.

D. Jesus established the Church while on earth. See Catechism 541

- Although the Church would only become manifest to the world at Pentecost, she began with the preaching of Jesus. And, although the term "church" is used only twice in the Gospels, Jesus clearly spoke of a church and established the elements of the Church while on earth. See Matt: 16:18-20, 18:15-20.

- Jesus authorized the Apostles, with St. Peter at the head, to guide the Church. See, e.g., Matt. 16:18-20; Luke 22:29-30.

- Jesus established each of the sacraments during His public ministry or time with the Apostles. See, e.g., Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 22:17-20; John 20:22-23.

- Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come to the Church guiding her to all truth. See, e.g., John 14:25-26, 15:26-27, 16:7-14; Acts 1:8.

VI. Jesus Christ died upon the Cross to save us from sins through showing perfect obedience and love to God. This action of Christ's death upon Calvary gained for us freedom from sin and death.

A. All of Jesus' ministry up to this point was a preparation for this sacrifice upon Calvary. As the great American Catholic preacher and writer Archbishop Fulton Sheen put it, "Every other person who came into this world came into it to live. He came into it to die. . . . The story of every other human life begins with birth and ends with death. In the person of Christ, however, it was His death that was first and His life that was last." Archbishop Fulton Sheen, The Life of Christ 20.

B. As light banishes darkness, so the love of God shown in Jesus overcame the guilt of sin, the perfect act overcame the condemnation due to evil actions. See, e.g., Rom. 5:15-21.

C. One can speculate about whether we could have been saved by another means, but it was most fitting for salvation to come through Jesus Christ's death upon the Cross for several reasons. See St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Part III, question 46, articles 2-4.

1. God's love for us was shown in the greatest possible fashion by suffering for us in this ignominious way. The sacrifice of Christ did not increase God's love for us, but showed it to us in the most powerful way. See, e.g., Rom. 5:6-8.

2. This sacrifice inspires the faithful to whatever sacrifices are needed for our own salvation and that of others. See 1 Peter 2:21.

3. There was a great balancing, insofar as the condemnation of man came through human sins, and so salvation was to come through a perfect human act. See Rom. 5:15-2, 8:1-5. And the triumph of Christ was all the greater precisely because the devil seemed to have triumphed before it. The worse the seeming defeat, the greater the victory. Precisely because of the crucifixion, Jesus received greater glory. See, e.g., John 3:14; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 5:8-9.

4. Jesus gave a greater dignity to humanity by achieving salvation in a sense from within, so that we were saved by one like us. And, in all suffering, we are joined more to Jesus. All innocent human suffering receives its final meaning by union with Christ. See Catechism 618.

5. The suffering of Jesus shows us the evil of sin. What the crucifixion and death of Christ did to His body and emotions, sin does to our souls. Jesus in a sense,

therefore, became the image of sin for us that we may see its destructive power. See 2 Cor. 5:21.

D. In addition, through the cross, God joined in the highest human action of love, that of dying for another. See John 15:13. Furthermore, all people who are suffering, especially the innocent, know that the Son of God has suffered with them. See St. Pope John Paul II, On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering (1984) 18.

VII. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ then restored justice and became the cause of our resurrection.

A. Jesus rose with a risen, glorified body that was based upon His former body, but now transformed so that He could go anywhere at will, without the usual barriers of time and space. See, e.g., Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:19. He could be recognized by people if He wished, but was not recognized immediately when He did not wish. See, e.g., Luke 24:16, 31; John 20:14-18. He rose with a real, tangible body, but one now beyond the realm of sin and death. See, e.g., Luke 24:38-43; John 20:27.

B. Even though our redemption was achieved by the suffering and death of Christ, the Resurrection was necessary. See 1 Cor. 15:12-19. St. Thomas Aquinas lists several reasons why such is the case. See Summa Theologica Part III q. 53 art. 1.

1. The Resurrection gives credibility to the Apostles and other witnesses. One may reasonably be mistaken about an abstract belief or an event from long ago. But no sane person, or especially group of people, could believe that they saw a who had been crucified and died alive and whole again unless it is true. That is one reason for the emphasis on eyewitness accounts of the life, death and Resurrection. See, e.g., Luke 1:1-4; John 21:24; Acts 2:32, 3:15, 5:32, 10:39-41; 2 Peter 1:16-18.

2. Christ's Resurrection is the cause of our future resurrection. See Catechism 655. He is, as St. Paul says, "the first-born of the dead." 1 Cor. 15:20. Jesus did not only promise the resurrection and the life. He is the resurrection and the life of all who trust in Him. See John 11:25.

3. Christ's resurrection also manifests God's justice even in this world. Without the Resurrection, we would believe that there is justice in heaven, but it would seem that the greatest injustice on this earth remains forever unbalanced by any good, that God has abandoned the world to injustice. But instead, "God would not allow His beloved to undergo decay." Ps. 16:10. And so the powers of injustice that sought to separate Jesus from the world are overcome and He, now alive, is with us always to the end of time. See Matt. 28:20. So, likewise, all efforts of evil to stop the faithful from bringing Christ to others will be overcome by the power of God's justice. See, e.g., John 16:33.

4. Fourth, and on a related point, the Resurrection assures us that our actions on this earth are important, that the way we treat our bodies is important, for there will be a new heavens and a new earth. The Resurrection refutes a Gnostic notion

that this world is evil and that our bodies are simply prisons of souls. Instead, as St. Paul says, our bodies are now as tents, which will be raised up again as Temples of the Lord in everlasting glory. See, e.g., 2 Cor. 5:1, 6:16-7:1.

5. Fifth, the Resurrection leads us not only to see our life with Christ as being dead to sin, but also as positively living in the Spirit with the Risen Savior. We are not only justified by deliverance from the guilt of sins, but sanctified to live out a life with Christ. Thus, Baptism is not only death to sin, but a rising to new life. See Rom 6:3-4; Col. 2:12.

6. Sixth, the Resurrection makes the Eucharist possible. Without the Resurrection, the Body and Blood of Christ would be a corpse, which obviously could not be eaten. Instead, the Eucharist is the risen Christ, giving glorified life to us from His place in heaven. See Summa Theologica, part III, q. 76, art. 1.

VIII. Jesus Christ then ascended into heaven after 40 days and will come again in glory to judge all things.

A. Jesus stayed with the disciples for 40 days after the Resurrection to give them final instructions and ensure them of the reality of the Resurrection. But then He ascended into heaven and sent them to evangelize all nations. He continues to be with us, but in invisible form. See Matt. 28:20.

B. Christ left the Apostles with His presence but not visible presence (except through the Eucharist) so that they would now be led by the Spirit to bring the Gospel to all nations.

1. By ascending into heaven, Jesus established the Church in heaven as well as on earth, and pointed the way there as our final homeland.

2. By being with His Church, but not in an obvious visible way, Jesus guided and guides His disciples, but allowed them (and us) use their creativity own talents in new ways; and he encouraged them (and us) rely more on the Spirit for their mission, while always being guided by His words and example. See John 16:7-8. They would not be receiving as obvious messages from Jesus as they did during His 3 years of public ministry, but rather would be guided by the Spirit through their abilities to evangelize the world.

C. At the end of all things on this earth, Jesus will return again in glory, in an undeniable fashion. We do not know the time of that event, for such knowledge would reduce the adventure of human life.

1. As the Book of Revelation describes, up to that point, history will be a series of seeming victories and failures, but all will be summed up by the judgment Christ will hand out to all peoples and nations. See, e.g., Matt. 25:31-46; Mark 13:5-37; Luke 21:5-36.

2. At the final judgment, the actions of all good and evil, will be revealed, and the meaning of each person's life and every event will become manifest. See Luke

12:2-3; Catechism 1038-41. And all nations, from all times and all places, now purified of sin, will be gathered together in the new and everlasting Jerusalem. See Rev. 21:15-22:17.

IX. Divine grace and forgiveness of sins comes from Jesus Christ, but He created the Catholic Church to confer that forgiveness and grace in the most decisive way.

A. After His resurrection, Jesus gave the Apostles the power to forgive sins. See John 20:23; see also Matt. 16:19, 18:18. When the Spirit was poured forth upon them at Pentecost, they both proclaimed the truth to the nations, and administered the sacraments to confer God's grace. See, e.g., Acts 2:1-41, 8:4-17; James 5:13-16.

B. The sacraments of the Church are central in conferring this forgiveness and in bringing us to the glory God has prepared for us

1. The sacrament of Baptism brings one cleansing from original sin, and any personal sins committed thus far. The physical water is a symbol that truly confers the cleansing and sanctifying power of God. See John 3:5; Catechism 1262-74.

2. After Baptism, the Sacrament of Confession confers forgiveness of actual sins. See John 20:21-23. It is essential for Catholics to confess mortal sins, i.e. those grave enough to break the friendship with God, and helpful for other sins. See Catechism 1456-58, 1856

3. If received worthily, the Eucharist also gives cleansing from venial (less than mortal) sins and strengthens one against future sins. See Catechism 1394, 1436.

4. If Confession is unavailable, Anointing of the Sick also confers forgiveness of sins. See James 5:14-15; Catechism 1520, 1532.

D. Furthermore, acts of prayer, penance and charity, when joined to Christ, work to overcome sins. See 1 Pet. 4:8; James 5:20. In addition to accepting the grace of God offered through Christ, we also act and pray to help overcome the effects of sin. The words of Christ and the Catechism especially recommend prayer, fasting and other sacrifices, and almsgiving and other forms of generosity. See Matt. 6:1-18; Catechism 1434; see also Tobit 12:8.

E. Far from neglecting the moral law because God will forgive us, we are called to a deeper sanctity, knowing the price that has been paid for our salvation. As Pope St. John Paul II pointed out in his encyclical on God the Father and divine mercy, Dives in Misericordia, paragraph 157, "In no passage of the gospel message does forgiveness, or mercy as its source, mean indulgence toward evil, toward scandal, toward injury or insult."

1. If we truly place our faith in Christ, we will respond by trying at least to do His will. Accepting Christ of its own accord will lead one to want to do what is right. See, e.g., James 1:22-27, 2:14-17. If one truly lives in accord with the Holy Spirit that life will of its nature produce fruits of good works. See, e.g., Gal. 5:19-23.

Once freed from the reign of sin, one will strive to live in that freedom under the law of God, rather than be a slave to desires and thus to sin. See Rom. 6:5-23.

2. We face a choice between the freedom of the children of God and slavery to sin. To choose sin and not repent of it is to choose that slavery to sin. See, e.g., John 8:34; Rom. 6:16-17.

3. If one does not act upon faith, the faith itself will eventually collapse because of the inconsistency. See Matt. 7:24-27; Luke 6:46-49.

F. Furthermore, if one is a citizen of the realm of grace, that membership implies that one will show forth that grace to others, by witness and by forgiveness.

1. The calling is, not only to live in friendship with God, but to bring salvation to the world, in part by showing God's goodness through our good deeds. See, e.g., Matt. 5:13-48.

2. There is a balance in that we accept the principle of forgiveness by showing forgiveness ourselves. See, e.g., Matt. 6:14-15, 18:21-35; James 3:13. But, as with God's forgiveness of us, that forgiveness does not simply mean leaving another person in sin, but rather acting to overcome the effect of sin in their lives. See, e.g., Matt. 5:6-7, 18:15-20.

G. God offers forgiveness to all people. However, each person makes the choice of whether to accept it and live in His light, or choose the darkness away from God. See John 3:16-20.