

Called to Be Disciples

What it means to follow Jesus

by Leisa Anslinger



What does it mean to be a disciple?

In Jesus' time it was not unusual for a person to seek out a master teacher from whom one could learn the ways of life and faith. Many expected that one of these teachers would be the Messiah, God's Anointed One, who would establish God's reign on earth.

Perhaps it isn't so different in our time. Hundreds of political, business, or self-help leaders present themselves as having the answers people need. If we're honest with ourselves, many of us hope one of these individuals will have what we're looking for.

In baptism, we begin a lifelong process of learning to live as Jesus teaches, and of bringing Christ's presence to others.

Our faith tells us that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Teacher who has the answers we need for our lives. Learning Jesus' ways is what discipleship is all about. Following Jesus is the work of our lifetime.

What does discipleship have to do with our lives? In baptism, we have been drawn into a living relationship with Christ and the Christian community. Baptism is the beginning of discipleship. In baptism, we begin a lifelong process of learning to live as Jesus teaches, and of bringing Christ's presence to others.

Living as a disciple is a way of life that holds as its foundation and model Jesus Christ. "Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. At every step forward, one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God's will. Being a disciple is not just something else to do, alongside many other things suitable for Christians; it is a total way of life and requires continuing conversion." (SDR, 15)

What does Jesus teach us? Think of the many Gospel stories you have heard or read over the years. Jesus' message is pretty straightforward when we get right down to it:

- Love God before all others;
- Love our neighbor as ourselves;
- Serve and love as Jesus serves and loves;
- Reach out to the poor, sick, oppressed, lonely, and imprisoned;

- Be part of Christ's mission to bring about the fullness of God's reign.

The challenge: As straightforward as Jesus' path of life is, it is easy to see the challenge in embracing Jesus' way as our way. Every step of this path will call us beyond ourselves, beyond what is comfortable, and beyond what may seem "normal" for many in our world. The way of the disciple is love, compassion (which means to suffer with), forgiveness and peace. Jesus teaches his disciples that caring for the needs of the poor is to serve Christ himself.

Let's get practical. In embracing discipleship as our way of life, there will be many little things, and some big ones we will need to do. We will consider practical steps toward discipleship on the reverse of this sheet.

Let's be spiritual. This is not something we do alone! We will find strength and guidance through the Holy Spirit and the community of faith as we commit ourselves to learning and following Jesus' way.



The Stewardship Project
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"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. ...By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13: 34a-35)



Practical Ways to Grow as Good Disciples

Think of discipleship as living in love

As we read the gospels, we realize that Jesus' call is to love as God loves. Practically speaking, this will change the way we live. Here are some practical steps for living discipleship:

Love God: Putting God first does not come easily to many of us. Doing so will call us to prioritize our time and action: Pray each day; make Sunday Mass our first priority; read the Bible regularly; participate in a small faith community, Bible study, or faith formation process; be open to a living relationship with our Lord.

Love Others: Jesus tells us we must love others as we love ourselves. For some, this means we have to accept ourselves as we are in order to love others well; for some, we need to focus on others as deserving of our love, even those we do not know and those we consider less important (God doesn't see them that way!).

Love Sacrificially: Jesus gave his very life for us. Taking up Jesus' way with our lives will call us to take up our cross -- in other words, to accept the difficult

things in life, knowing that Christ's resurrection gives us great hope, and to give beyond what seems reasonable; that is the way God loves, and we are called to do so as well.

Love Lavishly: Jesus' very life is witness and testimony to the lavish love God has for humanity. Learning to live as a disciple calls us to love and give generously. "In Jesus' teaching and life self-emptying is fundamental. Now, it might seem that self-emptying has little to do with stewardship, but in Jesus' case that is not so. His self-emptying is not sterile self-denial for its own sake; rather, in setting aside self, he is filled with the Father's will, and he is fulfilled in just this way: 'My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work.'" (Jn 4:34 in SDR, 19)

Love Actively: It isn't enough to say we love God and others, we must show our love by acting on it; serve regularly in a parish ministry, soup kitchen, food pantry, homeless shelter, hospital, assisted living facility, with a family member or neighbor who is ill or elderly, or with children. As Blessed Mother Teresa reminded us, we can do small things with great love!



Jesus' call is urgent. He does not tell people to follow him at some time in the future but here and now -- at *this* moment, in *these* circumstances. There can be no delay. 'Go and proclaim the kingdom of God...No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.'

(Lk 9:60, 62 in SDR, 14)



After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord -- and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." (Jn 13:12-14)

How Are You Already Living as a Disciple?

Living as a disciple is a conscious commitment to following Jesus with our lives. We will always have ways to grow as disciples. How are you already living as a disciple? What areas of your life need attention in order to grow as a disciple in the coming year? Use this space to record your thoughts and your commitment for the future:

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August 2013

St. Cecilia Church

Rev. James L. Secora, Pastor

One Minute Meditations

St. Francis Xavier Seelos

The Year of Faith saint for August is Blessed Francis Xavier

Seelos, C.Ss.R. He

dreamed of becoming a missionary like his patron saint, St. Francis Xavier. He traveled to Philadelphia, specifically to become a Redemptorist priest and dedicated himself to the mission of preaching. He became an insightful, attentive spiritual director. In New Orleans, he was pastor of the church of St. Mary of the Assumption where he died of yellow fever at the young age of 48 while nursing the sick during an epidemic.



Our powerful Lord

In the Gospels, Jesus healed people 20 times. Seven times Jesus expelled demons. Three times he raised people from the dead, and eight other miracles showed his power over nature.

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:46-48).



Tell me a story

Not everyone has a good faith story of his or her own. Some people haven't personally experienced the love of God or the warmth of a parish.

Perhaps someone in your life doesn't know how to turn to God in prayer or how to lean on him for strength or consolation. Telling a friend, neighbor, or coworker your own story could provide the spark she needs to begin a story of her own. Where do you start?

A similar situation – When someone confides in you a struggle he is experiencing, consider drawing an analogy to a similar experience in your own life. Include how you felt and how God supported you.

Peace obtained through prayer –

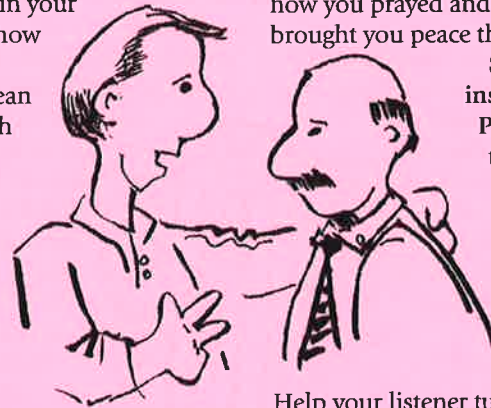
Not everyone knows how to pray when troubled. Talk about a time you experienced worry or anxiety, describe how you prayed and detail how God brought you peace through prayer.

Scripture inspiration –

Perhaps there was a time when hearing or reading a Gospel or a homily spoke to your situation and gave you hope or direction.

Help your listener turn to Scripture for inspiration.

We can't all be preachers, but we can all be **storytellers**. We each have a love story of how God has reached out to us. Sharing something so personal can help others see that God can work in their lives, too.



Why Do Catholics Do That?

The word "catholic" comes from the Greek, "katholikos." It means "throughout the whole" or "universal."

The first record of the Church being called "Catholic" quotes a first-century letter St. Ignatius wrote to the Smyrnaeans, "Where the

Why do we call the Church Catholic?



bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church." St. Cyril of Jerusalem (347) wrote, "Now it [the Church] is called Catholic because it is throughout the world, from one end of the earth to the other."

Reconciliation breathed into life by Christ

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation was born on Easter Sunday Night when Jesus came through the locked door, breathed on the Apostles and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive are forgiven, those sins you retain are retained." It began with the breath of Christ.

Baptism is a start. Baptism forgives all sins committed to that point. Sins committed after Baptism can be forgiven through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. When we sin, we harm ourselves, someone else, the Church (by



diminishing the holiness of the Church), and the community. It's necessary to face our sin, confess it, make amends for it, and avoid its repeat.

It's not just for mortal sins. It's imperative to seek forgiveness for mortal sins through this Sacrament but regular Confession is like having a spiritual check-up. Without it, our sense of sin starts to blur. And that is dangerous.

Contrition is more than regret. God cannot forgive sins without our contrition. Contrition looks toward the future. It helps us improve as disciples.

from Scripture

Luke 13:22-30, The narrow gate

When an ancient city was fortified, a central gate was built wide enough for carts and horses to easily pass through. When the city was threatened, the gate was secured and no one could go in or out. Hidden in an unnoticed part of the wall was an opening so narrow no one could pass through wearing armor or carrying weapons. It was often hard to find and difficult to reach.

Jesus used this image of a city wall to help his listeners understand the requirements for



passage into Heaven. Many will arrive at the gates of Heaven, expecting an easy "in" only to find the door securely shut. To enter, we have to be fit enough to find the way and shed the attachments of our earthly life so that we can freely pass through the narrow entrance.

There will be surprises on Judgment Day. Some who think they are entitled to Heaven will be turned away. Only those who work to keep spiritually strong will find the way.

Q & A Are we still required to fast before Communion?

The Code of Canon Law states: "One who is to receive the Most Holy



Eucharist is to abstain from any food or drink, with the exception only of water and medicine, for at least the period of one hour before Holy

Communion" (Canon 919, par. 1).

People who are in ill health or who would put themselves at physical risk if they abstain from food or drink should seek the advice of their physician about whether or not to fast before Communion.

Technically, chewing gum doesn't break the fast but it isn't necessarily appropriate during Mass. What do you do with the gum when it's time for Communion? If you swallow it, you are violating the fast. (And you should never stick it under the pew!)

Fasting before receiving the Eucharist reminds us of the great difference between earthly food, which sustains only perishable life, and the food of the Eucharist, which is key for eternal life. By observing the fast we approach Communion with a physical and spiritual hunger.

Feasts & Celebrations

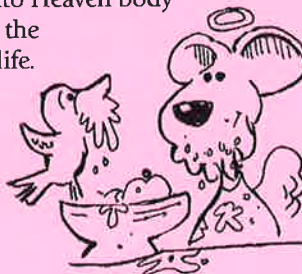
August 8 – St. Dominic (1221) Journeying through France, Dominic was alarmed by the popularity of Albigensian heretics who threatened the Church. They rejected material comforts while many Catholic preachers traveled in luxury. Dominic became an itinerant preacher like the Apostles and founded the Order of Preachers, "Dominicans."

August 10 – St. Lawrence (258) A Roman deacon to Pope St. Sixtus, II, Lawrence grieved when Sixtus was martyred but rejoiced when it was predicted that Lawrence would be martyred a few days later. Instead of

giving in to Roman demands for the Church's material treasure, Lawrence gathered the poor and destitute and presented them as the Church's treasure. He was martyred shortly afterwards.

August 15 - Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Declared a dogma of our faith in 1950 by Pope Pius XII, the Assumption celebrates Mary being taken up into Heaven body and soul at the end of her life.

It is a Holy Day of Obligation requiring Mass attendance.



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