

Emphases of the Eighth Grade Assessment - Diocese of La Crosse

God's Plan of Salvation History

What is Salvation History? Salvation History is the story of God's love for us: how God created man and woman in the beginning; how Adam and Eve rejected God through disobedience (original sin); and how God, in His infinite love for us, sent His Son (Jesus Christ – 2nd Person of the Blessed Trinity) to rescue us from sin, and reunite us with Himself (salvation). The story of how this happened is called the *story of our salvation*, or God's Plan of Salvation History. The following is a summary of this story – all the wonderful works that God has done out of love for us.

I. The Blessed Trinity

God is One in Three Persons (God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit); A Persons of total, self-giving love.

II. Creation

God created man and woman in His image and likeness. He created them to be one (in communion) with Him. Adam & Eve shared in God's Divine life. (CCC 375)

III. The Fall of Adam & Eve

Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. The first sin of Adam and Eve (Original Sin) separated them from God. Adam and Eve, and all their descendants, could not share in God's Divine Life. God alone could fix the problem of sin, and reunite mankind with Himself.

IV. The Incarnation

God the Son (the 2nd Person of the Trinity) became man to reunite God and man/woman.

V. Redemption

After three years of public ministry Jesus suffered, was crucified and died so that our sins could be forgiven. On the third day He rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven. By His sacrifice on the cross we were now able to again share in God's Divine Life (receive sanctifying grace in our souls) (cf. 2 Peter 1:4).

VI. The Holy Spirit at Pentecost

After Jesus ascended to Heaven, He sent God the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and Mary. The Apostles were strengthened to dispense the seven sacraments and the teachings of Christ. The Catholic Church, therefore, is a divine institution that was founded by Christ.

VII. The Church

Jesus established a Church (the Catholic Church), founded on the 12 apostles with Peter as the head whose mission is to teach and sanctify (to make holy) all of humanity. Through the Church we receive the seven sacraments and the teachings of Jesus Christ, guarded and protected by the Holy Spirit through the teaching authority or *Magisterium* of the Church. The gift of the *Magisterium* (the pope and the bishops) assures us that the teachings of the Church today are the teachings Jesus gave to the Apostles two thousand years ago.

VIII. The Sacraments

It is through the seven sacraments of the Church that we receive a share in God's Divine life (sanctifying grace within our soul). Sanctifying grace gives us the supernatural strength to be faithful to Jesus Christ by living according to His teachings as summed up in the Ten Commandments.

The Apostles' Creed

I. The Blessed Trinity

The mystery of the Blessed Trinity is One God in Three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus is God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. In order to save us from sin, Jesus assumed a human nature and became man. This is called the Incarnation. God the Father's sending Jesus to save us from our sin is called our redemption, which was accomplished by the Paschal Mystery that includes the four events of Jesus' Suffering, Death, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven. The Paschal Mystery made it possible for our sins to be forgiven and for us to be reunited with God. The Paschal Mystery is celebrated and made present in the Holy Eucharist and its saving effects of sanctifying grace, a sharing in God's Divine Life, are communicated through the Sacraments.

God the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus told the Apostles about the Holy Spirit and spoke of Him as the Paraclete, the Advocate and the Spirit of Truth. (CCC 692)

We can know that God exists through our human reason but for us to love Him, God had to reveal many things about Himself to us through the prophets. God most fully revealed Himself to us through His Son, Jesus. We could not know that the Blessed Trinity is one God in three Persons unless Jesus revealed the truth of this mystery in the New Testament. Jesus revealed to us many things about the Father and the Holy Spirit as found in the Bible and the Catechism. He taught us to pray, and how to live the Christian life – loving God above all and our neighbor as ourselves.

II. Creation

God created everything, both visible material things as well as invisible, spiritual things, such as the human soul. God created Adam and Eve as the crown of creation because the human person is created to be in friendship with God. Furthermore, God gave Adam and Eve a higher position (dominion) over the earth, which means responsibility to take care of creation (stewardship).

III. Image and Likeness of God

God created each person in His own image and likeness. This means that we have an immortal soul with an intellect (the ability to think) a will (the ability to freely choose good over evil) and the ability to be in communion with (to be united with) God, with other persons through friendship and with a spouse in a life-long commitment of marriage. Being in the image of God, we are called to love as God loves. Love means to give oneself in service to others, which is selflessness. The opposite of self-giving love is selfishness.

Of all visible creatures that God created, only man and woman are able to know, love and serve God. God has created us to be in communion with Him – to share in His Divine Life. This happens through prayer and most especially in the sacraments, above all in the Holy Eucharist. It was for this end, communion with God that we were created and this is the fundamental reason for our dignity.

IV. Mary

God created Mary without the stain of original sin so that she could be the Mother of the Savior. This is called the Immaculate Conception. Mary is the Mother of Jesus and Jesus is God. Therefore, we rightly call Mary the Mother of God. We are called to venerate Mary in her highest honor as Mother of God. Mary was assumed body and soul into Heaven. (CCC 495-502, 966)

V. The Catholic Church

Jesus chose twelve men and taught them all the mysteries of His Kingdom (cf. Matthew 13:11). He formed them to be the leaders of the Catholic Church, the only Church that He started. Out of the twelve men, Jesus chose Peter to be the head, making him the first pope. The Apostles were

Jesus' close followers but in their fear and weakness, they even betrayed Him. However, at Pentecost after Jesus had ascended back to Heaven, the Apostles were strengthened by God the Holy Spirit to do all that Jesus had commanded them. Therefore, we can rightly say that the Catholic Church is a divine institution, because it was started by Christ and was publicly manifested after the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles.

As the Church began to grow and the Apostles began to die, successors were appointed. They are called bishops with the Pope as the head. Each bishop in the world can trace his line back to the original twelve. (Judas was replaced by Matthias in Acts 1:15-26) The pope and the bishops of the world in union with the pope share in the teaching authority of the Catholic Church. This teaching authority is called the Magisterium. The pope and bishops guard and protect the teachings of the Church so that they are not changed. The teachings cannot change because Christ gave them to us.

VI. The Dignity of the Human Person

Each person is created with a body and a soul. Our immortal soul allows us to know and love. God gave this to us so we would know and love Him. By the power of knowing and loving God, we have a special worth over other earthly creatures. This worth is called "dignity."

All persons have equal dignity and dignity cannot be taken away. Furthermore, persons differ in talents and abilities but not in dignity. Dignity is not determined by how productive a person is in society. For example, a mentally handicapped person or a terminally ill person has the same dignity as a healthy person. Animals and plants have value and are important but they do not have dignity.

By sinning, we lower the perception of our own dignity and the dignity of others. Everyone has the basic dignity of being a person, that is, a creature that is able to know and love the Creator. When we use our abilities to think and chose the way God does, we help other people to see the goodness of God.

VII. Our Response to God

Our response to our belief in God should include: coming to know God's greatness and majesty; being thankful to God for giving us what we need; and recognizing the dignity of each person being created in the image of God. As followers of Jesus, we are called to use our talents to serve others, to unite our sufferings, in patience, with those of Jesus, and to read and reflect on the Word of God in the Bible.

VIII. The Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell

Death is one of the effects of Adam and Eve's sin, but was not part of God's original plan. After death our soul will come immediately before God, who will present our lives to us and we will know whether we have really loved God. Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ in Heaven (CCC 1008, 1021-1023).

If our love for God is not perfect enough for Heaven, we will go to Purgatory, a temporary separation from Heaven to have our soul cleansed and purified of all sins before we can enter the joy of being united with the Most Holy Trinity in a communion of life and perfect love (CCC 1024).

If we have freely chosen to separate ourselves from God by rejecting Him through lack of faith and charity, we will go to Hell. Hell is a place of eternal separation from God where there is no love of God, no love of neighbor and love of self. Hell is the "unquenchable fire," eternal punishment, and painful torment (Matthew 5:22, 29, 10:28; 13:42, Mark 9:43-48).

The Sacraments

Jesus instituted the seven Sacraments, which are sacred signs that give us sanctifying grace within our soul (a share in God's Divine Life). The seven Sacraments are Baptism, Reconciliation, the Holy Eucharist, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Matrimony, and the Anointing of the Sick.

I. The Sacrament of Baptism

In the Sacrament of Baptism, we are cleansed of original sin, become a child of God and a member of God's Family, the Church. At Baptism, God infuses the three Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity (love). These supernatural gifts allow us to believe in God, trust in His promises in the Bible and love God and our neighbor. A virtue is a good habit. We grow in the virtue of faith, for example through prayer and making acts of faith. The word theological means that the gifts of faith, hope and charity are given to us by God and He gives them to us to live in friendship with the Blessed Trinity (CCC 1812-1813). In Baptism, God also infuses the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit into the soul. (CCC 1266, 1830-1831) Students should know the signs and their meaning that are used in the Rite of Baptism, such as the white garment, candle etc. (CCC 1239, 1243).

II. The Sacrament of Reconciliation – a Sacrament of Healing

Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation Jesus wants to free us from our sins of selfishness that we commit after Baptism. Jesus gave the Apostles the power to forgive sins on Easter Sunday night (John 20: 19-22). This power has been handed on to all ordained priests. Through the power of Christ, the priest forgives sins. The steps to making a good confession include a) praying for the grace to know our sins and to be sorry for our sins b) examining our conscience c) confessing our sins d) receiving absolution and e) praying the assigned penance. In order to receive forgiveness for our sins, we must be truly sorry for our sins, make a firm commitment not to sin again and confess our sins to a priest. Students should know the Ten Commandments by heart.

Every sin is an act of selfishness. However, there are two types of sin: mortal and venial sin. Venial sin is sin that wounds our relationship with God but does not destroy our love for Him. We want to avoid venial sin because it can eventually lead to mortal sin. When someone commits mortal sin (very serious sin), he destroys his love for God and loses sanctifying grace within his soul. Sanctifying grace is a share in God's Divine Life.

In order to restore friendship and communion with God after committing a mortal sin, there must be repentance of the sin along with seeking God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (CCC 1861). We are to receive the Sacrament of Confession before receiving Holy Communion if we have committed a mortal sin.

In deciding what is right and wrong we should be guided by a properly formed conscience. Fundamentally, our conscience tells us to do good and avoid evil. The Sacrament of Reconciliation gives us the strength (grace) to follow our conscience, to break sinful habits, to forgive someone who has hurt us and to be more faithful in following Christ.

People are guilty of sin when they know something is wrong and freely choose to do what is wrong. Sins are acts of selfishness. We do not sin when we do something wrong by mistake or just feel tempted to do what is wrong. A desire to sin is a temptation. When we are tempted to do what is wrong, we should pray and cooperate with God's grace to resist the temptation.

III. The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist

Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper (Mt. 26: 26-30; Lk 22: 14-20) The two major parts of the Mass are the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In the Liturgy of the Word, there are three readings from the Bible. The first reading is from the Old Testament, the second reading is usually from the letters of St. Paul and the third reading is from one of the four Gospels about the life and words of Jesus. After the first reading, we respond to God's Word by praying a Psalm from the Old Testament. From listening to God's Word at Mass, we receive guidance in making good decisions, we come to know better how much God loves us and we are given direction on how to follow Jesus more closely.

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, after the priest prays the words of Jesus, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus (transubstantiation = change of substance). At the time we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, it is our closest union with Him on earth. It should be our desire to be totally focused on Him in our prayer.

We keep Sunday holy by attending Mass. The Sacrifice of the Mass continues (makes present) Jesus' Sacrifice of the Cross; Jesus is offered on the altar again but without shedding His Blood (in an unbloody manner) (CCC 1364). Together with the priest, we offer Jesus to the Father, the most perfect gift we can ever give to God. We also offer our obedience, thanksgiving, and service to the Father like Jesus.

IV. The Sacrament of Confirmation

The Holy Spirit is a Divine Person, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity. We use symbols to understand who the Holy Spirit is because the Holy Spirit does not have a body. These symbols include wind, breath, water, fire, cloud, and a dove (CCC 691-701).

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, our relationship with the Holy Spirit is strengthened. The Holy Spirit strengthens in the person the Theological Virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit that were received in Baptism. This special outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the same as once granted to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost. The supernatural Gifts are strengthened so that we can become a disciple of Jesus Christ in witnessing to the Faith and serving Christ by serving our neighbor. (See effects of the Sacrament in CCC 1302-1305, Gifts of the Holy Spirit CCC 1830-1831.) The bishop is the ordinary minister of Confirmation, but priests may also confirm (CCC 1312-1314).

V. The Sacrament of Holy Orders

A man is ordained a priest in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. In the Sacrament, the priest receives an indelible spiritual mark. Only a priest can forgive sins through the power of Christ and celebrate the Holy Eucharist. At Mass, the priest prays the words of Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus. The priest, by virtue of the Sacrament, acts in the person of Christ (in persona Christi) (CCC 1548).

This sacrament configures the ordained priest to Christ by a special grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he may serve as Christ's instrument for His Church. By ordination one is enabled to act as a representative of Christ, Head of the Church, in His triple office of priest (offering the Sacrifice of the Mass), prophet (teaching the Faith), and king (offering his life in service to others) (CCC 1581).

Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, bishops, priests and deacons continue the mission entrusted by Jesus Christ to His Apostles until the end of time. There are three degrees: bishop, priest and deacon (CCC 1533-1600).

VI. The Sacrament of Matrimony

The Sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony are directed to the salvation of others; if they contribute to personal salvation it is only through service to others that they do so (CCC 1534).

In the Sacrament of Matrimony, God Himself establishes a marriage bond between the husband and wife and this is for life. Jesus gives the couple grace to strengthen their love for each other, to forgive and to help each other grow in holiness. Marriage is a covenant (sacred partnership) between one man and one woman to show their love for one another, to have children and to be a witness of the union of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:25-26).

The dedicated single life is the vocation by which God calls some people to serve others by being single and/or living in community. These people live out the unfolding of baptismal grace. People called to this life of service may choose to be a sister, nun, brother, monk, hermit, consecrated virgin, or a single person (CCC 1618-1620).

VII. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is for the Christian experiencing the difficulties of a serious illness, old age or danger of death. The Sacrament confers a special grace and its full celebration includes Reconciliation, Anointing and the Holy Eucharist. The name “Viaticum” is given to the Eucharist for those who are about to leave this life, so that Jesus is with them as they pass from this world to the Father (CCC 1524, 1526-1532).

The Anointing of the Sick gives the person the strength to be sorry for sin and to resist temptation so that their friendship with God can be stronger now and at the moment of death.

VIII. The Liturgical Year

The liturgical year is a celebration of the life of Christ, and certain days are in honor of Mary and the saints. The liturgical year begins with Advent, the four weeks in preparation of the birth of Christ our Savior on Christmas. Advent is a time of penance as we die to selfishness and sin in order to prepare for the coming of Jesus. After Epiphany (the coming of the Wise Men) and the Baptism of Jesus, we celebrate Ordinary Time. Lent is the forty days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving in which we seek to gain control of our desires by making sacrifices. We want to become less attached to worldly things so that we are free to grow in our relationship with Jesus. The season of Lent is the forty days of penance in which we seek to die to selfishness in order to rise to new life in Christ on Easter. The Paschal Mystery, the mystery of the suffering, death, and Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, is celebrated during the Sacred Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. We call Holy Saturday the Easter Vigil. Forty days later, we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven. Ten days later, the Church rejoices with the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the public manifestation of the Church. From Pentecost to Advent, Ordinary Time is celebrated and we focus on the public ministry of Jesus: His call for us to believe in Him, to spend time in prayer each day with Him and respond to His graces by living according to the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes.

The Moral Life

I. The Ten Commandments

God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are God’s laws of love, the rules that help us know how to live to stay close to Him. Those who want to be faithful to Jesus show their love for Him by following His commandments (John 14:15). The students should know the Ten Commandments. Jesus summed up the Ten Commandments in the two Great Commandments: Love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. In other words, we cannot just believe in Jesus, we must also serve others, especially those in need. When we love others and ourselves we are doing what God wants us to do. God asks us to love our neighbor even as He loves us, and forgive others as Jesus forgives us (CCC 1823-1825).

Students are to know the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy and the Precepts of the Church. “The *works of mercy*” are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead” (CCC 2447, 2041-2046).

II. The Beatitudes

Jesus gave us the eight Beatitudes. The Beatitudes promise spiritual rewards for those who respond to God’s grace. Jesus calls us in the Beatitudes to change our interior attitudes that are the foundation for our outward actions. The Beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness. God has placed this desire in the human heart in order to draw us to Himself, who alone can fulfill it. (Matthew 5: 1-11; CCC 1718).

III. Conscience

God gave us a conscience so that we could know right from wrong according to the law written on our heart. However, it is hard to avoid what is wrong and do what is right. This is why God teaches us about right and wrong through the Bible, the Church and personal prayer. Furthermore, it is why it is important for us to listen to God in prayer and let God help us to make up our mind what to do (conscience).

Conscience is a practical judgment that we need to do this good or avoid that evil. A “right conscience” makes correct judgments, and an erroneous conscience makes bad judgments. (CCC 1776-1802) Our conscience does not make the Truth. Conscience detects the Truth. When we are forming our conscience and preparing for the moral decisions of the future, we must give Scripture, Tradition and the Teachings of the Church, which come from Christ, first place. Our duty as a Catholic is to listen to Jesus first. In following Christ, we are called to live according to the Beatitudes.

IV. Sin

We commit sin when we are disobedient to God by breaking His laws of love. Due to the effects of original sin, we are weak in our ability to resist sin (We have a weakened human nature.) (CCC 405, 1264) We are tempted to sin through our own selfish desires, through the influence of others, the culture, the media etc (usually referred to as “the world”) and Satan, “the father of lies” (John 8:44). The Holy Spirit helps us to resist temptation and to make good choices as we follow Jesus.

There are good (virtuous) and bad (sinful) choices. Right choices are the way that we love God, others and ourselves. Sinful choices are acts of selfishness. Sins wound us personally as well as in our love for God and others. There are two types of sin: mortal (deadly) and venial sins (CCC 1855). Mortal sin is a very serious sin (such as saying hateful things against God (blasphemy), using God’s name in vain, failing to attend Mass due to our own fault). When someone commits mortal sin, he destroys his love for God by losing sanctifying grace within the soul, which is a share in God’s Divine life. Mortal sin blinds us to the truth and it results in the loss of charity. Mortal sin must be confessed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If we die in unrepented mortal sin, we cannot ever be united with God in Heaven. For an act to be a mortal sin, it must be a very serious matter, the person must have full knowledge that it is serious and then freely make the choice to sin. A person who commits a mortal sin should not receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist until he/she goes to confession, receiving forgiveness and healing, by which the person is reunited with Jesus (CCC 1857-1859, 1861, 1415).

Venial sin wounds but does not destroy our love for God by breaking a commandment in a less serious matter. However, all sin is serious because sin offends God. Venial sin weakens charity, leads to a disordered affection (attachment) to persons or material possessions and impedes the soul’s progress in the exercise of virtues (good habits) and the practice of the moral good. Unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin.

V. The Christian Life – A Life of Faith, Hope and Charity

God infuses the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity into the soul of a person at Baptism. The Theological Virtues are supernatural gifts that must be developed and continue to grow through prayer and practice. The Theological Virtues help Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. The Christian Life is a response to the grace of God in seeking to grow in faith, hope and charity. For instance, when we stop growing in faith, faith begins to die. Therefore, we should continue to pray, on a daily basis, for an increase in faith, hope and charity to better follow Jesus. The Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity are the foundation of the Christian life. (CCC 1812-1829)

VI. The Cardinal Virtues, the Theological Virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The way that we make good and holy choices is through the exercise of virtue. Virtues are good moral habits that allow each person to be the best person she can be. The virtues of Prudence (making a right judgment) Fortitude/courage (firmness in doing what is right), Justice (being fair), and Temperance (practicing self control) are called the Cardinal Virtues. (CCC 1805-1809) Each of these virtues is a skill we develop to put our whole selves at God's service, to use our powers to love more perfectly.

God has given us the Theological Virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Baptism and they are strengthened in the Sacrament of Confirmation. In addition, God has equipped us with the Cardinal Virtues (as mentioned above) that are developed through education, by deliberate acts and by perseverance in struggle. These efforts are purified and elevated by divine grace (CCC 1810).

God has given us these Virtues and Gifts to live our dignity as children of God. The Theological Virtues lead us to believe and hope in God and love Him and our neighbor. The moral virtues (which include the Cardinal Virtues) govern our actions toward our neighbor. Modesty is a moral virtue that guides how one respects the dignity of other persons and one's own dignity by dressing appropriately.

The virtue of chastity, which flows from the virtue of temperance, helps us freely love and respect others as images of God, not using another person as an object of pleasure due to our weakness from the effects of original sin. Chastity requires self-mastery and self-discipline. Chastity is self-control of sexual desires that begin developing in the teen years. Chastity involves abstinence, which means saying no to sex outside of the life-long commitment of marriage. However, chastity is more about saying yes to Christ through proper respect for self and others by protecting and integrating God's gift of sexuality. To integrate the gift of sexuality means to make it subordinate to love and respect. This means that the gift of physical, spousal union is reserved for marriage alone. This integration is also preserved when a person foregoes earthly, spousal union for the sake of the total and willing gift of self to God in the priesthood or consecrated life.

This yes gives honor to God in guarding personal dignity and valuing every person as a child of God, which leads to a life of joy and peace. The dignity of the human person is the foundation of chastity. God calls us to the practice of chastity so that we can imitate the purity of Christ. The Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts and our response to His guidance makes it possible to imitate Christ (CCC 1814, 1817, 1822, 1804, 2522, 2337-2345).

VII. Vocations

God's plan for each person is called a vocation (calling). God created each person with distinct gifts and talents, which are to be used to serve God and others. Our personal vocation is not mainly what we choose to do but primarily what we have been chosen for. We seek to discover the adventure of life, which God has planned for us. Christ calls each person to follow Him in a special way as a married person, a dedicated single person, a consecrated person, or as an ordained priest. These are the personal vocations by which we respond to live God's primary call to seek and to love Him (the vocation to holiness of life).

God reveals our personal vocation through the deepest desires of our heart, through prayer, through role models, through the wise guidance of faithful adults, and through circumstances of life (CCC 1547-1551, 1601, 1618-1620, 1878-1880). Quiet prayer provides the opportunity to recognize that these desires actually originate from God and reveal the manner of serving others that will bring the greatest personal joy and fulfillment. Our personal vocation is the means by which we draw closer to God. A vocation does not just concern the individual person because a vocation involves serving others and building up the Church, the family of God. We should pray for the grace to serve God in our vocation with an undivided heart.

VIII. Social Justice

Justice is a Cardinal Virtue. Social Justice begins with love of God and is shown in love for neighbor. Love for neighbor entails respect for the human person in all forms. Dignity of the human person, and love of neighbor are at the heart of how Catholics are called by Christ to relate to others in society. There is in fact a certain resemblance between the unity of the Divine Persons in the Blessed Trinity, and the fraternal unity we are called to have with all members of the society we live in. This means that we have a responsibility for the good and well being of all in society, especially those who are poor, oppressed, and suffering. Hence in terms of Catholic social teaching, the Church has, and continues to have a preference and obligation to the both the physical and spiritual poor. This is also evident in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (CCC 1807, 1890, 1928-1948).

Our Prayer Life

I. What is Prayer?

Prayer is lifting up our minds and hearts to God – listening and talking with God in order to develop and continue to deepen our relationship with Him. Prayer is a gift from God. Jesus calls us to pray everyday and gives us the strength (grace) to respond to that call. We need to pray every day: in order to stay close to Jesus because any friendship builds on frequent communication. Without daily prayer our love for Jesus weakens. We need to set a specific time in the day for prayer, otherwise the time gets filled with other things; we are too tired right before bed; or we may simply forget to pray. At times it may be difficult to be faithful to daily prayer. However, we should continue in our prayer time and not give up.

Prayer is an essential way we respond to God Who loved us first. Prayer is necessary if we are to know God, know His perfect will for us and do His will. Living the Christian life over a period of time is impossible without prayer.

When a person in prayer has the desire to come closer to God, one should recognize that this personal desire has come from the grace that God has provided. God hears every prayer that we make and answers every prayer in a way that is best for us.

II. The Four Forms of Prayer

There are four forms of prayer: Adoration (praise and blessing), Contrition (repentance), Thanksgiving (gratitude) and Supplication (asking God for things). Today, the Holy Spirit continues to teach us how to pray and helps us to pray with our heart, the source of true prayer. The Holy Spirit also works in our lives by guiding and inspiring us to seek the good and avoid the evil.

III. The Mass

The Mass is the highest form of prayer because it is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is perpetuated (made present) and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's Body and Blood. To receive communion is to receive Christ Himself who has offered Himself for us (CCC 1382). Jesus asks us in the Ten Commandments to attend Mass every Sunday and on Holy Days of Obligation because He knows that we need to receive Him in Holy Communion to be strengthened for the difficulties of daily life. We are to fast one hour before receiving Holy Communion. This includes fasting from gum and candy. We need to participate fully in mind and heart in the prayers and songs of the Sunday Mass.

IV. The Our Father and Glory Be

Jesus taught the Apostles the "Our Father". It is important that we do not simply repeat a formula mechanically, but pray the words that express to the Father everything that we need. In the "Our Father", we ask for the coming of the Kingdom of God and for God to forgive our sins as we forgive others. The "Glory Be to the Father" is a prayer in which we give praise to the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.

V. The Holy Rosary

In praying the Rosary, we think about the different events in Jesus' life that help us to understand how He faced difficult situations. This meditation, in turn, helps us to respond to our problems in the same way that Jesus did. We are also able to ask for Mary's intercession in the Rosary.

Sacred Scripture

I. Divine Inspiration

The Sacred Scriptures are divinely inspired. This means that God is the principal author and the human authors are the instrumental authors. God did not dictate the Scriptures word for word to the human authors. Rather, He inspired the human authors by guiding and shaping the message but they wrote in their own style and from the culture of their day. Students should memorize the books in the Old and New Testaments, knowing the major events, such as the Ten Commandments, Jesus giving the Beatitudes, and St. Peter and St. Paul leading the Church.

II. The Covenants between God and man/woman

A Covenant is a sacred family bond (a partnership) that God made with specific people of the Old Testament. The Covenant was the means that God used to gradually bring us back into communion with Himself due to Adam and Eve's sin. The Original Sin caused our separation from God by our loss of sanctifying grace within our soul. God never broke the Covenant but the people of the Old Testament continued to break the Covenant with God through their sin. This was due to their weakness: they did not have sanctifying grace in their soul (a share in God's own Life).

God made five Covenants in the Old Testament with the following people: Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David. Jesus made the new and eternal Covenant with the Apostles at the Last Supper: "This is my blood of the new and eternal Covenant which will be shed for you for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in memory of Me." In asking the Apostles to do this in His memory, Jesus ordained them the first priests. The Apostles, and in turn their successors, the bishops as well as the priests were to give us the Sacraments. We enter the New and Eternal Covenant when we are baptized and we personally renew the Covenant with Jesus when we receive the Holy Eucharist. (CCC 54-73)

III. The Old Testament

The Old Testament relates how God created everything out of love. Man and women were the crown of creation, as they were created to be united with God. Through Original Sin, Adam and Eve separated themselves from God. The Old Testament is the history of the people waiting for the Savior to reunite God and man/woman. The people were not able to be faithful to God over any long period of time because Jesus had not yet reconciled the world to Himself through His suffering, death and Resurrection. At the end of the Old Testament, the Chosen People realized they needed a Savior to restore us to communion with God and so our ancestors were ready for Jesus to come.

IV. The New Testament

The Bible is the written Word of God. The Church considers the heart of the Bible to be the four Gospels. The four Gospels present us with the life of Jesus our Savior, who came to gather all people into the "family of God," the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Jesus was carrying out the Father's will to bring us back into communion with Himself through this Kingdom, the Church.

Jesus began the Catholic Church by choosing twelve Apostles, revealing to them what we need to know to love Him, specifically the truths about being His faithful followers. Jesus instituted the seven Sacraments, the way that we receive sanctifying grace within our soul, a share in God's Divine Life. Grace strengthens us to be Christ's followers. It was, above all, through His Death on the Cross and His Resurrection that He accomplished the coming of His Kingdom (CCC 541-542). Each person is called to union with Christ in and through His Church.