

Your Preteen Apostolate: Accepting and Sharing the Love of God



Nicholas Joseph Bottesi & Michele Elena Bondi
Illustrated by Nicholas J. Bottesi

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Not sure what God has in store for you?
His plans are wondrous, loving and beautiful.

Accept Him, seek Him, love Him,
and share His love with those around you.

Prepare to be amazed, for

God is at work in you!

This book is dedicated to
Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
and was written for
all preteens,
because your life has
great purpose.

May the youth of the world
accept, return, and share
the love of God,
which is
all encompassing,
never ending,
and
can never be contained.

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“When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

—Matthew 22:34-40

FOREWORD



There are many different kinds of books. Some could be about a pirate or space travel. Some others could be about a baseball player's life or the culture of the Czech Republic. My favorite books are about God's relationship with us. *Your Preteen Apostolate* is a great example of that style of book. This book goes straight to your heart and talks about things we preteens face in our day-to-day lives.

The author, Nicholas Bottesi, is a preteen with a great love for God as well as the courage to extend himself to others. In this book, he helps other preteens learn how to grow in their love for God. Nick is a young man who is true to his Catholic faith and to God. He helps his readers understand what really matters in their lives – that they love God with all their heart, all their soul, all their mind and all their strength – and realize that God loves them.

—Joseph Greene

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

—Matthew 25:40

INTRODUCTION



Each of us has our own personal apostolate that originates in God's love. All that we are and all that we have comes from God. All that we give is an extension of His immense love. As instruments of God, we must strive to be holy as we develop our apostolate and give of ourselves throughout our lives in loving service. The effort we put forth to accept, return, and share God's love is crucial to the formation and fulfillment of our life's work.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux tells us "God has no need for anyone to carry out His work, I know, but just as He allows a clever gardener to raise rare and delicate plants, giving him the necessary knowledge for this while reserving to Himself the care of making them fruitful, so Jesus wills to be helped in His divine cultivation of souls."¹ God's plans are awesome, and include each one of us! May we approach our personal apostolate with excitement and great joy and rely on God always to be our strength and our guide.

¹ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 113.

CHAPTER ONE

WE ARE LOVED



Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

—1 John 4: 7-12



Can you remember a time when someone did something that made you feel special? Maybe you were complimented, thanked for something you did, or a person gave you something you wanted. How did that gesture make you feel? Did you feel happy, accepted, approved of, appreciated, supported, or thankful? Perhaps you wanted to do something nice in return.

Now think about how it feels to know that all you are and everything you have was given to you by God. Keep in mind that everything He does comes from the great love He has for each one of us. Hopefully knowing that causes you to feel happy, accepted, approved of, appreciated, supported, and thankful to God. If we recognize love shown to us by other people then we should also recognize God in every loving gesture, because every act of love begins with Him.

You are very, very special to God. Have you ever heard the expression that God is never outdone in generosity? That is true, because everything seen and unseen comes from Him. God wants us all to feel loved, valued, and wanted because He loves, values, and wants us! He is the one who gave us our very first gift: the gift of life.

Just think, God made each one of us unique and created us out of love alone. He always loves us and is always with us. God

shows us His loving presence in many different ways as He communicates with us and encourages us to have a closer relationship with Him. The way He communicates depends on the situation. God may be insightful or simple, funny or serious. He is very symbolic and unimaginably loving. His infinite love is reflected in everything He does! Think about just a few of the many ways God shows you His love, *each day*.

God communicates with us directly and also indirectly. Sometimes He speaks directly, or one-on-one. Often He communicates indirectly, through something or someone. For example, God's presence is revealed to us through the use of our senses in the world He created (think of the sight of a sunny beach or the taste of your favorite food). God also loves us through the events in our lives, summoning us during every situation to draw closer to Him.

One of the sweetest ways God loves us indirectly is through the actions of other people. Have you ever had someone help you with your homework, or have a friend call

***God has loved
you, loves you
right now, and will
always love you!***

or visit just when you needed him? Remember when someone was kind to you? That was God loving you through other people. Have you ever felt inspired to do something kind? That was God loving someone else *through you*!

God designed a very special unit where each person is to experience the joy of being loved, valued, and wanted. That unit is the family. Every member of a family has a responsibility to express the love of God to, and receive His love from, one another. God's love for us should find its first expression from those in our families. This is where each personal apostolate begins and is first shaped.

Your parents and caregivers have an important apostolate which includes loving you. They have a responsibility to be faithful to their mission as God's instruments of love. Likewise, every member in a family is responsible for sharing and accepting God's love. Though this may sometimes seem like an ordinary thing to do, the giving and receiving of the love of God is never ordinary! Our expressions of love lead us to see God in one another. May we ask God often to help us with the important task of sharing His love with those in our family.

Your life has great purpose, and accepting, returning, and sharing God's love are necessary for you to carry out your developing mission and make your life the best it can be.

Perhaps you received God's love from the people in your family or from some of the people in your family. Maybe you did not receive the care and love God meant for you to have from those closest to you. Be certain that even before your family or any other person knew you, God knew you. **God has loved you, loves you right now, and will always love you!**

Sometimes accepting God's love, loving Him in return, and sharing His love with others are not easy things to do. We are hurt by the actions of other people or by events in our lives. Sometimes our wrong choices have caused us and other people harm. Fortunately God has the power to heal our past hurts, disappointments, and failures, and He respectfully waits for our permission to forgive us, heal us, and help us with His strength.

When we become aware of and accept His love then ask for

and accept His healing, God forgives us so we can live our lives with hope and joy. When we give God our permission, He works in us and through us. He gives us the courage and strength to forgive ourselves and others while constantly loving us through everything. When we place ourselves at God's service, miracles happen through our faith. We become more willing to accept love and to love in return. How cool!

Just by reading this book, you have started working on the best and most important relationship of your life: your relationship with God. Perhaps you started this important process already and now want make your relationship with Him even more meaningful. Each of the chapters in this book have one theme in common: **Your life has great purpose, and accepting, returning, and sharing God's love are necessary for you to carry out your developing mission and make your life the best it can be.** "If you live for Christ, not the slightest moment of your life goes to waste."²

This first chapter recognizes that we are all loved by God. The following chapters discuss accepting His love and loving Him in return. In conclusion, you will be encouraged to become God's instrument so He can love other people through you. Hopefully God's great love for every one of us will come across on every page! Let us ask God for a greater awareness of the many ways that He loves us, invites us to know Him better, rejoices when we love Him back, and allows us to share His great love with others.

2 Fulton J. Sheen, *Our Grounds for Hope*, p. 36

WE ARE LOVED

The Free Apple Pie



One summer day my family went to morning Mass and then out for breakfast at a bakery. After eating we went home to rest for an hour. My Mom suggested that we go to the indoor skateboard park in town for some fun and exercise. My brother, sister, and I were excited because we were allowed to use our own money to buy brand-new skateboards there!

The skateboard park has a wonderful store. When we arrived to pick out the parts for our skateboards I could not believe it! There were many different colored decks, trucks, wheels, nuts, bearings, and screws to choose from. So many different combinations of boards are possible! I wanted to make my skateboard look like fire and so did my brother. My sister wanted a girlish board.

I chose a deck with a natural wood top and a red bottom, tires with red and white flame-like streaks, and matching red trucks. The older boys working in the shop put the skateboards together on a counter while my brother, sister, and I got to watch. I had something to look forward to because my skateboard

was built last. That was so exciting! Once my skateboard was done I hugged it. We wanted to ride our new skateboards right away but there was a skating camp in session. We could not skateboard until open skating began in one hour, so we left to get hamburgers for lunch.

At the restaurant I ordered my favorite meal: a burger with onions, fries, and a frozen Coke. The restaurant was promoting the latest movie and had scratch-off instant-winner tickets on some of their food containers. My meal came with a ticket! I was so excited, but the print was so small I could not read the instructions. There were two areas to scratch off on each ticket. After scratching off one side and part of the other side, I realized that I had won a free apple pie! I happily took my winning ticket to the counter and the lady said "You scratched off two sides so you lose." I felt so disappointed but was also mad at the burger place.

My mother approached the counter and spoke to another employee about the ticket, but she was very busy and was very rude to my mother! We sat down and ate lunch. While eating I was sad but then found another scratch-off ticket. I did what they wanted this time and only scratched off one side, but that side was not the winner. The other side was! I could have won a cheeseburger. My whole family was disappointed about the apple pie ticket and the rudeness of the two people we had spoken to. After a while we made the decision to let go of our disappointment and instead be happy and grateful for our time together at Mass, receiving Jesus in the

Eucharist, our delicious breakfast, buying and building our own skateboards with money we had saved, and our burger lunch.

God wants us to be grateful for all the blessings He has given to us and not focus on the things that, for whatever reason, are kept from us. His only Son Jesus gave up His life for every person. If God chose to do that for us, we can decide to be grateful for what we are given and not focus on what we do not have. After all, we cannot have everything! And next time I get a ticket for a chance to win free food or other prizes, I am going to be sure to read the fine print!

WE ARE LOVED

Questions For You To Answer

- ☞ Think of some ways you have received the love of God from other people.
- ☞ What have you done for other people to make them feel loved?
- ☞ How has God loved you directly, through your senses, or through the events in your life?
- ☞ What are some of the sweetest ways He has shown His love for you?
- ☞ What have you done to love God back?

Say this prayer:

Dear God,

Thank You for loving me
in so many different ways,
directly and indirectly,
through my senses and circumstances.

I also thank You
for loving me
through the people You put in my life
to love me in Your place.
I love You back!

Amen.

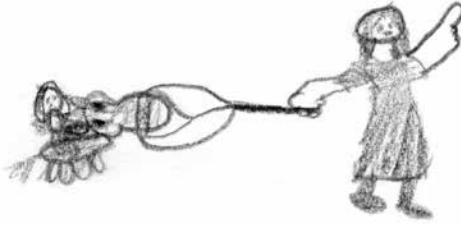
CHAPTER TWO

FOLLOWING THE HOLY FAMILY



Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

—Matthew 1:18-25



God in His goodness never leaves us alone as we tend to our responsibilities. Not only is He always with us, He has given us wonderful role models to follow in the Holy Family. Through the examples of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph we learn about what it means to live one's life with great love. The Holy Family experienced both the joys and hardships of living in the world. What joy Joseph and Mary felt as Jesus, the long-awaited Savior of mankind, lived among them as a member of their family! They held the infant God, *Creator of the universe*, as a humble baby in their arms.

The Holy Family also experienced great suffering, and we learn much when we study how they responded to hardship. We know from Bible accounts that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph did not live a carefree life up to the time of Jesus' passion and crucifixion. Instead they endured many hardships including poverty, pain, sorrow, relocation, threats to their safety, deception, temptation, mistreatment, rejection, abandonment, fatigue, uncertainty, physical discomforts, persecution, cruelty, hostility, unfairness, and personal loss.

Like us, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph each had a personal apostolate. They agreed to be instruments of God's great love. Every person ever created has benefited from the love of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. God's plan to redeem the human race was fulfilled because the Holy Family cooperated with Him in good times and in times of suffering. Think about them when you are tempted to feel that suffering has no value! Let us consider some events from the lives of the Holy Family.

Mary showed great faith when she consented to become the Mother of Jesus (Luke 1:38). Pope Benedict XVI explained “Mary’s greatness consists in the fact that she wants to magnify God, not herself....She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world if, rather than carrying out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God’s initiatives.”³ For his part, Joseph trusted in God even though he did not know the circumstances of Mary’s pregnancy (Matthew 1:18-21). God chose that His Son Jesus be born into poverty (2 Corinthians 8:9; Luke 2:7), which meant a life of poverty for Mary and Joseph. Imagine how Joseph suffered as he tried in vain to find suitable shelter for Mary to deliver the Son of God into the world, “*because there was no place for them in the inn*” (Luke 2:7).

Mary and Joseph were obedient and presented Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:22), where they heard the sorrowful prophecy of Simeon: “*This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too*” (Luke 2:34-35). At God’s command, the Holy Family had

***Every person
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has benefited
from the
love of Jesus,
Mary, and
Joseph.***

to leave their home and move to Egypt because Herod wanted to kill the child Jesus (Matthew 2:13-15). Later they obediently returned to Nazareth (Matthew 2:19-23). Jesus wept with sorrow when His friend Lazarus died (John 11:33-35) and later for the people of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44). During Jesus’ public ministry, men tried to trick Him with words (Luke 11:53-54) and also plotted against Him (Luke 20:20). Jesus was tempted by the devil (Luke

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (“God Is Love”), #41

4:1-2; Luke 4:13), and also betrayed by one of His twelve Apostles for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-16).

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus became sorrowful and troubled (Matthew 26:36-37). "He now sensed guilt to such an extent that it forced Blood from His Body, Blood which fell like crimson beads upon the olive roots of Gethsemane, making the first Rosary of Redemption."⁴

"And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.'" (Matthew 26:39). He was arrested and led away by armed soldiers and officers (Mark 14:43-46; John 18:12), forced to stand trial (Matthew 27:11-14), and sentenced to death (Luke 23: 23-25). Imagine how sad His loving Mother felt as she saw her kind Son treated so badly! "Then they spat in his face and struck

***May we try
our best to live
obedient, holy
lives, through
good times and
bad times, even
when we do
not understand
everything.
We are wise to
imitate the love,
faith, sanctity,
courage, and
obedience of the
Holy Family.***

him; and some slapped him, saying, 'Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?'" (Matthew 26:67-68).

"And they clothed Him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes

⁴ Fulton J. Sheen, *The Life of Christ*, p. 321-322

on him. Then they led him out to crucify him” (Mark 15:17-20). “And carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them” (John 19:17-18).

Jesus was rejected by many people, among them some of His closest followers (Mark 14:66-72). John was the only Apostle with Him at the foot of the Cross. As Jesus was being crucified, soldiers divided the garments of their Savior by casting lots (Matthew 27:35). Others mocked Him (Matthew 27:39-44). Jesus forgave everyone (Luke 23:34).

Jesus’ decision to suffer and die to redeem us is the greatest act of love mankind has ever known. His personal apostolate was one of tremendous love! We know the whole story today, but the people of Jesus’ time did not know how the events of their time would play out. The members of the Holy Family were obedient even when they did not understand God’s plan. They did not demand that God tell them everything in advance.

They did not insist that God give them exactly what they wanted when they wanted it. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were obedient to God and did not give up, even when doing what God asked them to involved great personal suffering. What faith, what courage! Their courage and strength came from God. May we try our best to live obedient, holy lives, through good times and bad times, even when we do not understand His plan. We are wise to imitate the love, faith, sanctity, courage, and obedience of the Holy Family.

FOLLOWING THE HOLY FAMILY

Cooking Is Creating



I like to cook. Cooking is quite fun and yet difficult at the same time. I like the feel of food in my hands and enjoy seeing how my food is made. What fun to see the different types of seeds in every kind of vegetable and fruit. I also like to cook on the grill and enjoy watching the food get made. Sometimes I like to smoke the meat. After seeing a cooking show that worked with fish, I also want to work with fish because that looked really fun.

My favorite foods to cook are chicken, shish kabob, steak, and hamburgers. I like to work with meats because they cook well and I like to season them with spices. I also enjoy deciding what types of vegetables go with different types of meat. Cooking is like creating art because the food is your creation and that takes skill to accomplish.

I recently made shish kabobs for the first time. First I had to buy tomatoes, zucchini, onion, and peppers. The peppers I chose were red and green.

When I got home I washed the vegetables, then chopped up the peppers, onions, and zucchini and put them in the seasoned marinade I made. I cut the steak into cubes and put the meat in the same bowl. All the ingredients were mixed together and the marinade covered everything to give the kabobs flavor. After marinating for a day I took the ingredients and alternated them on skewers and then cooked them on the grill. My shish kabob was delicious!

All the different ingredients came together to make a wonderful meal, just like different people work together to make the world go 'round. Each of my ingredients contributed to the flavor of the dish, just like we as people contribute to the good of society. I also served my family by cooking and treating them to a delicious meal. Together, we serve God in the beautiful world that He gave us. I really enjoy cooking, just as I really enjoy doing my part in this beautiful world.

Nick's Chicken Kabobs

- 1 tbsp. spicy brown mustard
- 1 tbsp. cider vinegar
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 tsp. crushed dried rosemary
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. black pepper
- 1 sweet red pepper
- 1 sweet yellow pepper
- 1 onion (optional)
- 1 zucchini or yellow squash (optional)
- 1 lb. boneless chicken breast, cut into 1 inch cubes
- 1 lemon, cut into thin wedges

Preheat grill. In a bowl, mix brown mustard, cider vinegar, olive oil, rosemary, salt, and pepper. Add chicken, vegetables, and lemon wedges. Mix to coat. Thread chicken, vegetables and lemon onto skewers, place on grill and cook, turning several times. Serve on a bed of rice. Add cashews if you like.

Enjoy!

FOLLOWING THE HOLY FAMILY

Questions For You To Answer

- ☞ What are some of the joys you have in common with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph?
- ☞ What are some of the hardships you have in common with those of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph?
- ☞ What has God requested of you in your life so far, and have you responded as the Holy Family did?
- ☞ Have you asked God to help you?

Say this prayer:


Dear God,

Thank you for providing
wonderful examples
for us to follow
in Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.
Please guide us and strengthen us
through joys and trials
as we seek to emulate
the Holy Family
and remain faithful to Your will.

Amen.

CHAPTER THREE

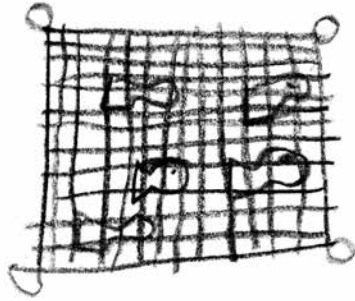
CALLED TO FAITH



Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they

began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

—Luke 5:1-11



To allow one's self to be called to faith is to take a step closer to God. Having a personal relationship with God is necessary to our discipleship. We need to know God to recognize what He asks of us. We need His strength and guidance. As we continue to allow ourselves to be enticed to faith, over time we become even closer to Him and grow in holiness. Let us consider a few of the many ways that we are drawn to faith each day. Have you ever had someone smile at you? Has someone ever helped you in any way? Then you have been called to faith!

Have you been around another person? Or looked at yourself in a mirror? Has someone been an inspiration to you? You have been called to faith! Have you laughed lately? Have you spoken to a small child? Were you ever worried about someone else? Have you ever cared about anything? You were being called to have faith!

Have you ever seen the rays of the sun coming through the trees on a bright morning? Do you have a favorite song? Have you ever looked at a beautiful picture? Have you ever been lost in a daydream? Can you think of a time you saw a colorful sunset or a harvest moon? Have you ever noticed the whiteness of snow, jumped in it, touched it, tasted it, shoveled it, or slid down it? You were being called to have faith!

Have you ever bounced a ball really, really high up in the air? Or jumped in a huge pile of leaves? Did you ever look at the leaves

in fall and think about their Creator? Have you ever been concerned with the environment? Have you ever felt a soft breeze? Have you ever considered how many different flowers, animals, flavors, snowflakes, or people there are? Oh, how you were being called to have faith!

Did you ever feel happy? Have you ever said a prayer? Have you ever found holiness in a moment of silence? Have you ever wanted to visit God in His house after passing a church? You were being drawn to faith! Have you ever felt grateful for something? Have you ever thanked God for anything? Have you ever heard a giggle? You were being called to have faith!

Have you ever thought about what it is like to be loved more than you can ever imagine, forever and ever, no matter what, just because you are you? Did you ever have something sad happen that caused you to suffer, but your suffering led to something good? Were others inspired by your courage? Guess what? You became closer to God when you allowed yourself to have faith. Chances are that God has even worked through you in many ways to encourage others to have faith!

In the Bible, the Gospel of Luke tells us the story about Simon and the other fishermen trying in vain to catch fish, while Jesus drew people to faith through His teaching. Imagine Simon's reaction when Jesus joined the fishermen and asked Simon to let down the nets.

***Have you
ever felt
grateful for
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Have you
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thing? Have
you ever
heard a
giggle? You
were being
called to have
faith!***

The fishermen had caught nothing all night! Despite making a logical and educated guess that they still would not catch any fish, Simon allowed himself to be called to faith. He did what Jesus asked him to do.

They ended up catching so many fish that their nets were breaking! Simon had to ask the fishermen in another boat to help them with all the fish. Everyone was amazed that this time Simon had caught so many fish. Simon

What does God have planned for you? To find out, allow yourself to have faith!

then apologized to Jesus for his lack of faith. He said, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Have you ever found yourself in a situation like Simon’s, when you were encouraged to have faith? Can you place yourself in the story in Simon’s place? What would you have done?

God works with us like He did with Simon, and asks each of us to believe and trust in Him. So many times we respond with disbelief as Simon did. Sometimes we think our ideas are better than God’s ideas. Sometimes we tell God that what He has in mind is not possible. Simon thought he was using good logic when he said, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing.” What do you think would have happened if Simon refused to be obedient? What happens when we refuse to have faith?

Simon allowed himself to have faith in Jesus and obeyed, saying, “Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets. ” Jesus then said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” The apostolate of Simon and the other disciples changed when they agreed to be followers of Christ. They were fishermen and became fishers of men. As a result of their obedience, God

was able to use them to introduce and teach the Catholic Faith to people all over the world.

By choosing to have faith, Simon and the Apostles helped God with His plan of salvation. Our obedience is pleasing to God and necessary to our Christian life. Obedience is necessary so God can work through us. He will not act in us without our permission. What does God have planned for you? To find out, allow yourself to have faith!

CALLED TO FAITH

Skateboarding Is Life



One day we went with our friend and neighbor Josh to the skateboard park in our town. The park is part indoors and part outdoors. Many children skateboard there. There are steep ramps, stairs, and rails. There is also a very high ramp and some kids ride beyond the edge of the ramp, right up the wall! Riders place stickers on the wall to show how high up they were able to go. You would be amazed to see how high up those stickers are. I like going to the skateboard park because skateboarding is fun. While there are not many ramps one can go on as a beginner, by my fourth time there I was pretty good. Now I am able to go down and up more of the ramps.

The skatepark offers skateboard lessons on Saturdays. The lessons have been helpful to me. They are taught by experienced teen riders who showed me how to stand on my board properly. I also learned how to grind, go down ramps, and how to turn. The instructors are very polite and helpful. Some of them are very good and are able to do intense grinds and jumps. They can also flip their skateboards in the air

and land back on them. I enjoy going down and coming back up the big ramps the best.

My skateboard looks like fire with the red deck, trucks, and wheels, and I named it "Wildfire." Before long my board had some nicks and scratches in it, but that is okay because they show that I am making progress. At first I hoped that my board would remain perfect, but understand that the scratches come from my using and having fun with my skateboard. My next skateboard is going to be all blue with silver screws and I will name it "Frostbite."

Our lives are a lot like my skateboard and the skateboard park. When we are new at something, we find our skills are limited but when we stick with what we are doing we learn and are able to do many more things. The many-sized ramps at the skateboard park take me up and down. Sometimes I even fall off my board. Life is like that, too. We experience ups and downs and sometimes we fall. Then we get up and keep on going. Just like when my skateboard was new and now has been used, we start out on our journey perfect and then get some nicks and scratches as we live and try things along the way. We can still have fun and enjoy the ride!

CALLED TO FAITH

Questions For You To Answer

- ☞ What are your favorite titles for Jesus?
- ☞ Are you willing to have faith and to allow your faith to grow?
- ☞ In what ways have you been called to faith?
- ☞ How have you responded?
- ☞ How is God calling you closer to Him, and what are you doing to give Him the proper place in your life?

Say this prayer:

Dear Lord,

Please help us
recognize
the many ways
You attract us to faith,
for the first step
in having
a relationship with You
is recognizing Your Presence.

Amen.

CHAPTER FOUR

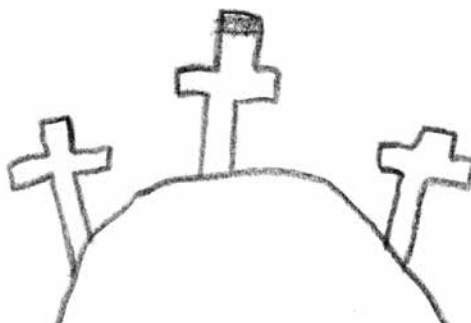
ACCEPTING GOD'S LOVE



One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah?

Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

—Luke 23:39-43



Think of just one good friendship you have had and what that relationship has meant to you. Now imagine what having a closer relationship with God will mean to you! If we want to have close relationships with people, it makes sense to first and foremost have a close relationship with the One who created us, loves us, and wants to be loved by us in return. Have you ever heard the expression “To have a friend, be a friend”? Ask yourself: Do I welcome God’s presence and His goodness in my life, or am I rejecting Him?

Do I even recognize God’s presence? If so, how often do I accept Him? Only when things in my life are going good? Only when things are very difficult for me? Once a month? Every Sunday, perhaps at Christmas, a little during Lent, and most likely at Easter because that is a Holy Day *and* a Sunday? Do you realize God is with each of us every moment of every day? How many times we are tempted to say “Not now, God.” How often we create and nurture relationships on our terms, not giving any consideration to what others want or need. How often we treat God the same way!

The first step to beginning any relationship is to make the decision to have a relationship. To have a relationship with God, we must respond to His call by deciding that we want to have a relationship with Him. Just like relationships with people require work, so too does our relationship with God. Decision first, effort second!

Healthy relationships need love, respect, effort, nurturing, time, good communication, patience, trust, understanding, forgiveness, and sacrifice from both parties.

God is the best role model and shows us how we can have happy relationships. In His relationship with us, God always gives us love, respect, attention, nurturing, and a lot of time. He communicates openly with us and is patient as we learn, make mistakes along the way, and make progress. We can always trust Him and He is always very respectful. God never forces us to do anything and allows us to make decisions for ourselves. As a caring Father, He also gave us rules to follow in the Ten Commandments.

In His relationship with us, God is infinitely and unconditionally loving and understanding. He is not distant but is always close. He is forgiving. God is also sacrificial, dwelled among us as our Brother, and through his suffering and death opened the gates of salvation to all who will accept it. *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”* (John 15:12-13).

When we think about the time and effort we put into relationships, we get very useful information about ourselves that helps us understand the quality of our relationships. Looking at

***God is the best
role model and
shows us how we
can have happy
relationships.***

our behavior this way can lead to personal growth, make our relationships better, and can be put to good use in the work we do every day. Relationships suffer when they are neglected. Regardless of the current quality of our relationship with God, He always loves us, always pursues us, always welcomes us, and is always willing to take up where we left off. No matter what effort we put forth, God always does His share. Let us eagerly meet our most loving God halfway.

Think of how many times you have been judged, blamed, rejected, neglected, or condemned by another person for something that you have or have not said or done. Think of how many times you have acted this way toward others. How many relationships end because of a lack of forgiveness. What pain we feel when we are judged, blamed, rejected, neglected, condemned, or not forgiven. Imagine how God feels when we judge, blame, reject, neglect, condemn, or hold a grudge toward Him. How many times we unfairly reject God! Yet He eagerly awaits our return and always welcomes us back.

***Imagine having
a relationship
with someone
who is always
available,
patient, kind,
and merciful.***

The Gospel of Luke shows Jesus continually exercising His ministry of pardon.⁵ Luke 23:39-43 tells us that the Good Thief crucified on the cross next to Jesus recognized and admitted that his own punishment was fair. In his terrible condition, the guilty man accepted responsibility for his actions. At a time that could have been one of such great hopelessness, he allowed himself to have faith, asked Jesus for forgiveness, and accepted salvation.

Why would the actions of this particular person be mentioned in the Bible? The Good Thief was compassionate to our mistreated Lord, who came to save everyone. At the moment Jesus saved the entire human race, one of the people who Jesus came to save recognized his Savior. He saw that Jesus was severely and unfairly punished, but instead of resisting, Jesus forgave and redeemed every sinner. Imagine the joy the Good Thief's decision gave our Lord as He suffered so terribly! May we also give Jesus the joy of accepting His love and forgiveness.

We realize from the conversation between the thieves crucified with Jesus that the Good Thief acknowledged his Savior *and* was

⁵ *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 161

remorseful for his sins. "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." The story of the Good Thief is important because he acknowledged Jesus' personal ministry of sacrificial love and forgiveness and accepted Jesus' entire offer, *all in one sentence*. "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

Jesus' final words before He died were spoken to the Good Thief: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." For his trust, the Good Thief was rewarded and was among the first of men to enter into heaven! May we learn from what we have been taught by the personal apostolate of the Good Thief and accept the redemption offered to us by our Savior, accept responsibility for our actions, and treat everyone with the mercy shown to us by Jesus.

Each of us has the opportunity to have a relationship with someone who knows us best. God knows us even better than we know ourselves. Imagine having a relationship with someone who is always available and is always patient, kind, and merciful. God never rejects us, always listens to us, and is always willing to reconcile with us. Envision having a close relationship with the One who loves you so immensely that He gave His life so that you could spend eternity in His most loving Presence.

Once we choose to begin a relationship with God or improve the relationship we have with Him, and truly work at it, our relationships with other people also improve. There is more peace. We are better able to carry out our apostolate and are happier. Let us model all our relationships on God's relationship with us. We can begin like the Good Thief did, by welcoming Him into our lives and accepting His love, for He comes where He is welcomed.

ACCEPTING GOD'S LOVE

The Adventures of Lily



My young ferret Lily does not like to remain in her cage. She tries to escape any way she can. One day Lily found a way to get out of her cage through the food container. We could not find her anywhere. After searching for about an hour we still could not find her. We continued the search after lunch. While my brother was looking around he found a clue. The trap door in the living room fireplace was open. We suspected that Lily had fallen down the trap and was imprisoned in the basement!

We were very worried about her and ran down to the basement to the two tiny fireplace trap doors by the furnace. The doors had been painted shut years ago by our home's previous owners. We started working very quickly to get the doors open and free Lily. She had to be in there! We were able to get one door open, but to our great disappointment she was not in there. She had to be behind the other door! Not knowing what condition we would find Lily in, my mother raced upstairs to get a hammer so we could

pound the door open and free her. I did not wait for my mom to get back. In an heroic attempt to free Lily, I punched the door open with my fist! The door opened slowly and I started crying.

When I opened my eyes, I saw that Lily had crawled out from behind that second door and was all covered in dust. We gave her some water and some food. Everyone was overjoyed that she had been rescued and was fine. Lily is very smart and has a great taste for adventure, and still tries to find ways to get out of her cage. I do my best to make sure she remains safely inside her cage.

The moral of the story is that I will always love Lily no matter what trouble she gets into and will always take good care of her. As our Father, God feels the same about every one of us! He always loves us no matter what trouble we get into and He always looks after us. What do you think?

ACCEPTING GOD'S LOVE

Questions For You To Answer

- ☞ How much effort do you put into the friendships that matter to you?
- ☞ How strong are those relationships?
- ☞ How much effort are you putting into your relationship with God?
- ☞ How close to Him do you feel?
- ☞ What have you done to welcome His presence in your life and meet Him halfway?
- ☞ How has your relationship with God affected your discipleship?

Say this prayer:

Dear God,

Help us to recognize
Your many invitations
to have a closer relationship
with You.

Grant us the grace
to meet you halfway,
and accept
Your loving offer of
salvation and sanctification.

Amen.

CHAPTER FIVE LOVING GOD BACK



So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink" (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food). The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans). Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." —John 4:5-15



The first four chapters in this book covered important things we should think about as disciples of Christ. We recognized the fact that God always loves us. We learned from the lives of the Holy Family and look to their example to guide us as we carry out our life's work. We considered some of the many ways we are called to faith each day and saw ourselves as instruments of God encouraging others to have faith. We discussed how accepting God's love leads us into closer relationship with Him and with others.

This chapter takes us another step closer to God as we consider returning to God the unconditional love that He gives to us. By answering the questions at the end of the first four chapters, you have already grown closer to the Love of your life. Already your efforts have led toward accepting God's love as you allow your faith to grow. Now we move on to our responsibility to love God back, for "...love is repaid by love alone..."⁶ Before we can love in return, we must first be willing to accept love, so let us first consider how we respond to being loved.

Ask yourself these questions. How do you respond to being loved in general? Are you comfortable receiving love and loving in return? Do you feel worthy of being loved? How many reasons we can come up with for not being worthy of love! Have you ever done

6 St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 195

that? Many times we reject love and are not even aware that we are doing it. Recognizing how we respond when others express kindness, empathy, and compassion to us and understanding the reasons behind why we act that way are very important. In order to be loved, we must give our permission to be loved. There is no doubt God wants us to accept His love in the many ways that He sends it. Let us think about this some more.

When someone compliments you, do you accept the compliment with humble gratitude, do you hesitate to accept the gesture, or do you totally reject compliments? How do you respond when someone offers to help you? Do you accept a helping hand and recognize the love of God in the offer? Do you accept help only if you absolutely have to? Or do you reject help, perhaps not wanting to be a bother? Keep this in mind: ***it is impossible to bother God.***

So often we get into the habit of rejecting love. We may do this with the best of intentions. However, we reject God's love when we act this way. Rejecting the love of God through the actions of other people stops the work God is trying to accomplish through them. An awareness of how we respond to being loved and understanding when and why we reject love helps us to see our responses to love in a different way. God never refuses our love, so let us fully accept the love

There is no doubt God wants us to accept His love in the many ways that He sends it....God never refuses our love, so let us fully accept the love that God sends us, directly and indirectly.

that God sends to us, directly and indirectly. Then we can love God back in turn, directly and also indirectly by serving other people. *“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”* (Matthew 25:40).

In the story of the Samaritan woman at the well presented at the start of this chapter, Jesus was tired from traveling and went to the well to ask the woman for a drink. In her autobiography *Story of a Soul*, St. Thérèse commented on the conversation Jesus had with the woman. “See, then, all that Jesus lays claim to from us; He has no need of our works but only of our love, for the same God who declares He has no need to tell us when He is hungry did not fear to beg for a little water from the Samaritan woman. He was thirsty. But when He said: ‘Give me to drink,’ it was the love of His poor creature the Creator of the universe was seeking. He was thirsty for love.”⁷

***Many times
we reject love
and are not
even aware
that we are
doing it.***

***Rejecting the
love of God
through the
actions of
other people
stops the work
God is trying
to accomplish
through them.***

Accept God’s love in all the many different ways He cares for you and be sure to love Him back. We accomplish this directly and through the work we do in our imitation of Christ. During the final moments of His mortal life, Jesus stated from the Cross, *“I am thirsty”* (John 19:28). God

⁷ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 189

thirsts for our love! “If Jesus Christ thirsted for souls, must not a Christian also thirst? Has He not called us to be His Apostles and His Ambassadors, in order that His Incarnation might be prolonged through the continued dispensation of the divine through the human?”⁸ We can quench God’s great thirst by loving Him back.

8 Fulton J. Sheen, *The Rainbow of Sorrow*, p. 62-63

LOVING GOD BACK

Preteens Have Many Chances To Love God Back



An important part of your apostolate includes being nice to everybody you meet, making friends, and being good to those friends. You can even meet new friends when you meet your friends' friends. Making friends is a wonderful way to love God in return. Another way you can show your love for God is to say something nice to someone who has been mean to you and then walk away. When I am in school there are a lot of opportunities to love God back by following His commandment to love others.

In middle school the teachers can sometimes be harsh, but I do not defend myself or yell back like I sometimes want to. Sometimes I get excluded by kids during recess and so I walk away and find a group of friends who do want to play. How important it is not to exclude anyone when playing with our friends! When we welcome someone into our group,

we also welcome Jesus. When someone argues with me, yells at me, or tempts me by using bad language or telling stories that offend God, I love God back when I do not give in to the temptation to become angry or to do something wrong.

Although it may feel good sometimes to be unfair in return, use bad language, or join in the telling of a bad story, those are sinful behaviors that distance us from God. When we respond by doing something good instead, set a good example by walking away, or discourage others from using bad language or telling bad stories, we behave in ways that please God. Ask yourself in every situation, "What would Jesus do?" If acting a certain way does not feel right, then do not do it! Ask someone you trust to help you. When you are tempted, Jesus will always help you do the right thing. When we make decisions that Jesus would also make then we live in imitation of Christ. What better way to love God back than to model your life after His Son!

LOVING GOD BACK

Questions For You To Answer

- ☞ How do you respond when love is shown to you by others?
- ☞ Is it easier for you to accept love from people when realizing that all love comes from God?
- ☞ Do you see yourself as worthy of God's love?
- ☞ When you recognize yourself as worthy of love and understand that God wants to love you, is it easier to accept the many ways God loves you each day?
- ☞ Is it easier then to love God, yourself, and others in return?

Say this prayer:

Dear God,


You love and value us
with patience and kindness
through all the moments
of our lives.

May we make
our relationship with You
complete
by choosing
to love You back.

Amen.

CHAPTER SIX

SHARING JESUS' PASSION



Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

—Matthew 27: 27-31



Sometimes during our lives we go through trials that cause us to suffer physical, emotional, and spiritual pain. Suffering is part of being human. Often suffering is very unpleasant and we may try to avoid suffering at all costs. However, suffering plays an important part in our development as Christians and is of great value as we live in imitation of Christ. That is because suffering plays an important part in loving!

While the experience of love can be very pleasurable, love can also cause us great pain. For example, when someone we cherish dies, we experience profound sorrow. When we acknowledge the suffering of another person, empathize with them, and serve them, we share their pain. By having relationships with people we risk experiencing pain many different ways. Love can cost us much. His love for us cost Jesus everything.

To mature spiritually, we must understand how we feel about suffering. Then we can change how we react to trials if need be. Ask yourself these questions. Do you feel that suffering is worthless? Do you feel that suffering is a part of life that God can use in some way for greater good? Do you try to accept difficulties patiently while relying on God's strength to get you through? Are you willing to accept suffering if God is asking you to?

Those caring for the sick, young, frail, lonely, abandoned, and in those in need are wonderful examples of sharing the same sacrificial love that Jesus shows to each of us. What we do to help

those in need we do for Jesus. On the other hand, when we allow ourselves to be the ones ministered to, we cooperate with the Christ-like service of other people. Let us take care not to block the actions of God working through others!

Pain can cause us to sometimes pull away from what is or what we think is causing us the pain. Sometimes when we suffer, we may blame God or distance ourselves from Him. However, suffering has great value for us. Just as a sculptor carves his masterpiece to perfection over time and with much effort and attention, so too are we sculpted and refined as people through painful experiences. *“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing”* (James 1:2-4).

By taking a look at how we act when we are frustrated, disappointed, when we have to wait, when we have lost or are separated from someone or something we care about, are led down an unexpected path, or when we are in pain, we gain important insight about how we view suffering. Do we become frustrated when events shock us out of our comfort zone or when we experience discomfort? Do we ask God that we and others get exactly what we want? Or, do we pray for the strength to keep trying and remain faithful to God and His plans? Do we see our plans as being better than God’s plans? Are we willing to wait, patiently and with trust, for events to play out according to God’s plans if that is what He asks of us?

***By having
relationships
with people
we risk
experiencing
pain many
different
ways. Love
can cost us
much.***

Some of the difficulties preteens face include peer pressure, trouble in school, teasing, little free time to play, disagreements with adults or other kids, illness, the death of a loved one, and relocation. Sometimes terrible things happen. The goal is to trust God, especially when life is the most difficult, and ask Him for help when we are suffering. May we see all circumstances as opportunities to bring us closer to God and to each other.

If we are unwilling to accept the discomfort and pain of trials, neither we nor our Christian discipleship can ever mature to become extraordinary. We increase our sanctity when we patiently cooperate with God through all circumstances. How often we have the misconception that God is very close during prosperity and is very distant during trials! Actually, God is never so close to us as when we accept difficulties with great love. Why? When we bear our trials patiently and lovingly, we resemble Jesus. Hardships teach us compassion and remind us that it is important to think about the needs of others. Often during trials we find God loving us through the compassion of others. Great things are accomplished when we persevere through trials and allow God to work in us and through us.

Just as Jesus' crucifixion led to our redemption and was followed by His glorious resurrection, so too can our suffering be followed by our own resurrection of sorts: closeness with God, personal growth, greater holiness, a deeper faith, and greater compassion for others. The outcome is love! Something very critical happens during times of difficulty: we find ourselves more willing to turn to God. Whenever we suffer we should ask God, "What are You trying to tell/show/teach me?"

Suffering provides us the opportunity to reevaluate, learn, and grow in virtue and love. Suffering is essential to our life's work. Many times we are able to serve others better and become more compassionate as a result of our trials. How important it is to be open to God's plan during such pivotal times, and maintain our trust in Him.

Certainly the suffering Jesus endured throughout His lifetime and at the time of His death had great purpose. As discussed in Chapter 2, Jesus suffered a great deal during His mortal life. He embraced a life of poverty and service, living and dying for our sake. God chose to do this to help us. What would have happened if Jesus decided not to suffer for us? What happens when we resist during times of trial instead of being open to God's plans?

Some difficulties preteens face include peer pressure, trouble in school, teasing, disagreements with adults, and relocation.

Jesus' personal ministry was one of sacrificial love. *"Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end"* (John 13:1). Let us boldly define trials as events having tremendous value that extend beyond ourselves to benefit countless others. Let us examine the essential role of suffering in our personal apostolate by looking to Jesus as our model to imitate. "Every pain patiently borne, every blow to self, shapes the real eternal self. It was the Crucifixion of Our Lord that prepared the way for His Resurrection and Glory."⁹

In previous chapters we discussed acknowledging God's presence in our lives, accepting His love, loving Him in return, and allowing Him to use us as instruments of His love. This process can be refined and can come to fruition through suffering. Consider this beautiful description by Fulton J. Sheen, "Every tear, disappointment and grieved heart is a blank check. If we write our name on it, it is worthless. If we sign it with Christ's Name, it is infinite in its value. In prosperity, Christ gives you His gifts; in suffering with faith, He gives you Himself."¹⁰

9 Fulton J. Sheen, *Our Grounds For Hope*, p. 36

10 Fulton J. Sheen, *Our Grounds For Hope*, p. 14

SHARING JESUS' PASSION

God Is At Work In You And In Me



I am in middle school and just started seventh grade. I thought sixth grade was very difficult and suffered a lot during the school year. Often I came home with subject-area effort warnings because I forgot to hand in homework, did not have a paper signed, or forgot to do a project. There were many things to get used to, much to do, and many things to remember. I had a lot of trouble getting used to the demands of middle school.

The teachers were harsh at times and that upset me, but my mother said the teachers have to keep order in the classroom so everyone can learn. The kids were sometimes harsh too, in words and in actions. Sometimes someone was nice to me by sticking up for me at the lunch table and that made me feel good. I also stuck up for kids who were being bullied or mistreated.

Last year I had a lot of trouble keeping my locker organized. Having a locker and changing classes was new to me and we were given only four minutes between classes to get books out and put binders and books from the last classes back in. At the end of the day we had to clean our homeroom and then rush to our lockers, pack up, and get to the car line before it started moving. There are many demands in middle school and not all kids are ready yet for the challenge. Sometimes the teachers do not acknowledge that and it is frustrating. Everyone is so rushed and there is so much to do.

Having friends helped me. My mom also helped me by talking to my teachers, and together they got me the extra help I needed while I adjusted. My older brother helped me get organized by going to my locker after school and giving me tips on where to place my books and what to carry. He also helped me with my homework. Thinking about the things I like in school also helped me last year. I enjoyed lunchtime with my friends, art, and getting candy often for being quiet and cooperative.

Sometimes we have to do things that we do not always like so something good can come out of it. Jesus did that for us when He died on the Cross to save all of us. He may not have wanted to suffer like He had to, but He accepted the will of His Father for our sake. We may not always like everything about school, but going to school is a part of our mission as children and a way for us to give glory to God. My mother has her job as a parent, writer, and psychologist, and she says that my job is to learn. By learning I am serving

God in my apostolate. I will continue to serve Him as I get older. My mission has already changed a great deal and will continue to evolve as I grow, learn, and experience new things.

My apostolate began as a baby when I already brought much joy and purpose to my family, our friends, and our community. Everyone who helped me grew in holiness through their apostolates. When I started school I began serving God in some other ways. I began learning, interacting with others, and offering my opinions and knowledge to other people. I made my First Eucharist, put God first in my life, and receive Jesus as often as I can. I bring His love to other people in many ways. In fourth grade I became an altar server at my church. More recently I started going to Reconciliation once a month to remain close to God. I also volunteer, encourage people, visit those who are lonely, love my family, mentor younger children, and am nice to people.

Jesus asks us to live in imitation of Him. That means we should listen to God, respect His rules, and always try to act like Jesus would. That is not always easy. There are many choices to make every single day, but God always gives us the strength to choose good friends, movies, songs, games, clothing, books, activities, and ways to spend our time when we ask Him to help us decide. He suffered and died in our place, so in return we should do our best to live holy lives.

SHARING JESUS' PASSION

Questions For You To Answer

- ☞ In what ways have your trials helped you to grow closer to God and to others?
- ☞ Have you ever asked for patience and help from God when you were suffering?
- ☞ Do you ask for the grace to see events from His perspective?
- ☞ Do you feel greater love for God knowing He chose to suffer for your sake?
- ☞ How has suffering affected your developing apostolate?

Say this prayer:

Dear God,


Please give us the grace
to trust in You always
and to view trials as opportunities
to grow closer to You and to others.

Guide us
as we open our hearts
and allow ourselves
to develop
and be transformed
into the likeness
of Your Son Jesus.

Amen.

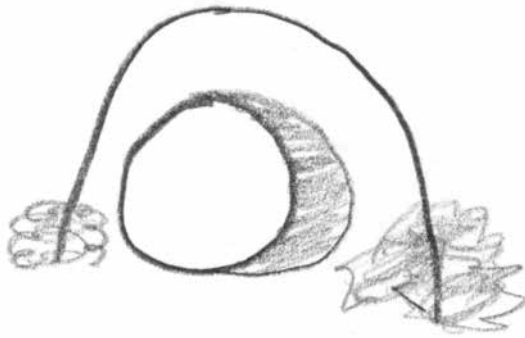
CHAPTER SEVEN

HIS RESURRECTION AND OUR JOURNEY AND



While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

—Luke 24:36-47



Imagine what life was like for Mary, the Apostles, and the followers of Jesus immediately after His passion and death. They must have felt stunned and terribly sad. Perhaps they also felt confused and uncertain like they did in Jesus' final days: *"They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him"* (Mark 9:30-32).

God's plan did not end when Jesus died, because on the third day He resurrected as foretold in the Old Testament. Imagine the joy His beloved Mother, Apostles, and followers experienced when Jesus appeared to them! *"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:16-20).

Jesus' Mother and His Apostles and followers experienced dramatic changes to their apostolic life after His death and resurrection. They accepted God's will and the Catholic Church spread throughout the world. The previous chapter covered the important role suffering plays in our relationship with God and in our service to one another. We also considered how suffering can transform us as followers of Christ. Trials can motivate us to consider taking a path that we may never have considered otherwise, one that is more in conformity with God's will.

Imagine if God came right out and said to several of the Apostles, "In three years I want you to stop fishing. The work you have done most of your life is about to change. After Jesus' crucifixion I will institute a new religion called Catholicism and you are going to travel extensively to bring it to people all over the world." Imagine what their reaction would have been! Instead, Jesus prepared His followers for their evolving apostolate through-

***The world
benefits
from the
contributions
of every
person's
Christian
service,
including
yours.***

out His public ministry and also after His death. The Holy Spirit enlightened them during Pentecost, and God continued to guide them through the Holy Spirit and Mary. Similarly, God prepares and guides each of us with His loving "Triune approach" through Mary, His Mother.

Trials may lead us to look outside our limited view so we can consider God's plan for us in a way we may not have thought about. However, difficulties can also lead us to behave in ways we would not otherwise. Fear and pain that is not resolved can handicap us. In the Bible passage quoted at the start of this chapter,

Jesus acknowledged the feelings of His Mother and the Apostles when He appeared to them after His Resurrection. He stated, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” Jesus reassured and instructed them, stating that as it was foretold, He would suffer and rise again on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached to all nations in His name.

Great good came out of Jesus’ sacrifice for us, and His presence after the resurrection must have brought His loved ones great comfort. Jesus did not tell anyone to get even, to hold a grudge, or remain in despair. God had work for them to accomplish! He wants us to ask Him for healing and also allow ourselves to be forgiven while forgiving others so we can best share in His great ministry of love. God is always ready and available to heal us, so ask God to mend your wounds and He will.

Earlier in this book it was mentioned that once we have made the decision to have a relationship, that relationship will need to be nurtured. Our relationship with God can have its ups and downs just like our relationships with people do. We have the security of knowing that God always remains the same and loves us unconditionally. We can be especially tempted to doubt when we suffer. Sometimes even though we love God we decide to hold back from greater faith, intimacy, and trust. This can happen when we are disappointed or hurt. Perhaps we have been hurt by our own choices, or we have been hurt by people and events in our lives. Unresolved anger, grief, and trauma can cause us to resist when things do not work out the way we had hoped or planned.

Throughout life we need to ask God to help us recognize what our hurts are. God who created us understands exactly how we feel and why we feel the way we do. He patiently waits

***When we ask
God to guide
us in our
efforts, He
will!***

for us to accept His personal invitation to know Him better. Each person has been given a unique mission in conjunction with God's divine plan. Each of us has our own unique talents and we are always learning. Even if our gifts are not always known to us, each of us has them, and each of us is necessary. Plain and simple, **the world benefits from the contributions of every person's Christian service, including yours.**

"The reason moments of catastrophe may be the eves of spiritual victory is because it is in those moments of defeat that man's pride is most humbled and his soul thus prepared for the help of God....It is only when Peter had labored all the night and taken nothing that he was given the miraculous draught of fishes."¹¹ Tests prepare us for growth and change. Ask God to reveal to you how He wants you to serve Him, throughout your evolving apostolate.

When we ask God to guide us in our efforts, He will! Do not doubt, for the God who can make something out of absolutely nothing can provide for our needs. He longs to bring us peace, healing, and inspiration when we are ready. The first step is to make the decision to acknowledge God and accept Him into our lives. Then we must put forth the effort to have our relationship with Him grow. Like the Good Thief, our reward will be great.

¹¹ Fulton J. Sheen, *Our Grounds For Hope*, p. 31-32

HIS RESURRECTION AND OUR JOURNEY

The Power of Language



Communication is a very important part of our lives. What we say and how we say it tells us a great deal about where we are in our faith journey. We say many words every day, but how often do we think about what we are actually saying? God gave us language as a way to communicate with each other, and language is very important to the apostolate of most people. Just as any worker requires the proper tools to do his best work, we do our best work when we use language to accomplish God's will. It is never God's will to use words to harm another person. When we encourage others with the words we use, we help them to feel valued. The words we use should express the love God has for each one of us.

How wonderful it is when people use language properly! We use words to express our wants, needs, and emotions. We use words to talk to God through prayer. With words we praise God and tell Him and others that we love and value them. Words have enormous potential. Tap into that! Words teach. Words provide hope. Words build things. Words heal. Words help us share God's love as we serve others throughout our lives.

We use words to give each other loving nicknames. We sing beautiful songs with words. We use words to create inspiring poetry. During Mass we profess our belief with a simple "Amen" and then receive our Savior! We use words during the Sacrament of Reconciliation to admit our sins and, through the power of God, the priest uses words to proclaim that we are forgiven. We use words to make promises and renew them. The words we use can change the world! May we use the great gift of language given to us by God to make the world a better place.

During His life, Jesus used words to encourage and teach others. He never used words to harm people, not even when He was being crucified. Instead He said, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Those words of mercy came from the tremendous love God has for every single one of us. We must act like Jesus and speak to others with love, mercy, and compassion. If our beloved Jesus could love and forgive while being spit at, struck, mocked, tortured, and crucified, let us respond in His honor by loving and forgiving regularly and by speaking to others with love, mercy, and compassion.

To get better at speaking kindly, practice doing it often. Speaking kindly is very joyful and rewarding. There are so many wonderful words to choose from! Jesus never justified the use of bad language as we so often do when we say, "They deserved it." Jesus was so kind because He was meek and humble. All people deserve to be loved. May we live in imitation of Christ by humbly using our words to joyfully serve others and bring glory to God.

HIS RESURRECTION AND OUR JOURNEY

Questions For You To Answer

- ☞ Have you ever been angry at God or blamed Him during times of suffering?
- ☞ How long did God patiently wait for you to accept His encouragement and strength?
- ☞ What helped you to get through hardship?
- ☞ Do you feel that trials provide an opportunity to grow spiritually and personally?
- ☞ How has your personal apostolate changed over time?

Say this prayer:

Dear God,

May we find
personal strength and healing
in the example of
Your glorious resurrection.
Help us to persevere beyond trials
to find joy and purpose
as we serve You
through our remarkable and changing
personal apostolate.

Amen.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF SANCTITY



Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples – for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

—Mark 2:13-17



Jesus' decision to eat with tax collectors and sinners was shocking behavior in those times. Nevertheless, Jesus sought out sinners throughout His public ministry. The Pharisees were very angry that He lived among, taught, and reached out to sinners. Jesus continues this "shocking" behavior in our time as He lovingly reaches out to us. Loving us is never scandalous behavior to God, and yet we still sometimes resist when He challenges us to be holy and happy.

This chapter discusses how important it is to make holy choices day by day, moment by moment, as we serve God in our apostolate. When Adam and Eve committed the first sin, God's original plan for us was changed by that sin, which led to a division between man and God. Yet God continued to love us and promised to send a Savior who would conquer sin and restore the human race. At the appointed time, Jesus became Man and took our sins upon Himself to satisfy Divine Justice. The fulfillment of God's plan came about through the sacrificial love and obedience of Jesus.

Jesus' passion and death on the Cross made it possible for all people to go to heaven. However, to make God's plan possible each of us must cooperate in our own salvation. Even though Jesus died to save us, sin continues to distance each one of us from God and a soul can still perish of its own free will by deciding not to cooperate with Him. "God wants us 'all to be saved'; for this reason He gave us His Son, and with Him and through Him, all

the means necessary for our salvation. Therefore, if a soul is not saved, it alone will be responsible.”¹²

Sanctity is “...the perfection of the Christian life....As grace grows and flourishes in our soul, its influence becomes deeper and wider; and when this influence extends effectively to all our actions, directing them solely to God’s glory and uniting us wholly to Him by means of charity, then we have reached the fullness of Christian life, sanctity.”¹³ “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must for-

give. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful” (Colossians 3:12-15).

Our salvation depends on our efforts to live holy lives. We can also help others be more holy by setting a good example. “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). To make our salvation possible, we must cooperate with God in the choices we make. Our behavior leads to very real outcomes for ourselves and others. Sanctity is necessary to discipleship as we try

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12 Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., *Divine Intimacy* p. 6

13 Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., *Divine Intimacy* p. 9

our best to live holy lives and encourage holiness in others. To live in uniformity with God's will, we must make being holy a way of life. *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"* (John 14:15).

When does sanctity begin within us? "Baptism has deposited within us this seed of sanctity, which is grace, a seed capable of blossoming into precious fruits of supernatural and eternal life for the soul that zealously cultivates it. By elevating us to the supernatural state, grace makes us capable of entering into relations with the Blessed Trinity, that is, capable of knowing and loving God as He is in Himself, as He knows and loves Himself."¹⁴

To grow in sanctity, we must live and love heroically. This is accomplished when we follow His commandments. We become sanctified when we honor His Sacraments, go to Mass as often as we can, make frequent use

An important part of living a holy life is to share God's love however and whenever we can with other people.

of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and do penance for our sins. We become like Jesus when we receive Him in the Eucharist. We become more Christ-like when we talk to God in prayer, read His Living Word in the Bible, and learn about our Catholic faith. We become holy when we are obedient to His will. "Our following of Christ, who is God made man, is the infallible road to sanctity. This same incarnate God is the source of all the graces we need to become holy. As He told us, 'Without me you can do nothing.' Without His grace, our minds are blind. Without His grace, our wills are helpless to do what He wants of us to reach that blessed destiny for which we were made."¹⁵

14 Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., *Divine Intimacy*, p. 9.

15 Father John A. Hardon, S.J. Archives, *Christology*

An important part of living a holy life is to share God's love however and whenever we can with other people. "It has been said it makes no difference what you believe; it all depends on how you act. This is psychological nonsense, for a man acts out of his beliefs. Our Lord placed truth or belief in Him first; then came sanctification and good deeds. But here truth was not a vague ideal, but a Person. Truth was now lovable, because only a Person is lovable. Sanctity becomes the response the heart makes to Divine truth and its unlimited mercy to humanity."¹⁶

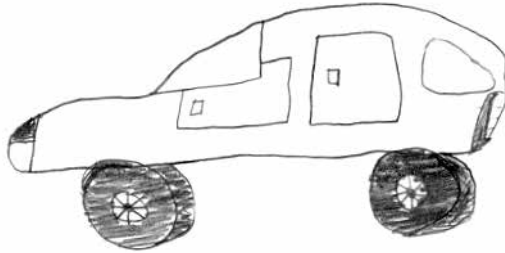
"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:7-12).

Sanctity is crucial to loving God, ourselves, and each other and is essential to our apostolate. Each of us is called to live a holy life. **We are called to be saints!** We become sanctified through the effort we put into our relationship with God, and our sanctity bears much fruit through our apostolate. May we look to God to strengthen and guide us as we grow in holiness, each and every day.

¹⁶ Fulton J. Sheen, *Life of Christ*, p. 313

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF SANCTITY

The Grand Canyon Rental Car



Several years ago my family and I went to the Grand Canyon. We flew into Phoenix and rented a car to travel four hours north to the Grand Canyon. The car came with a full tank of gas. The agreement was that when we returned the car before flying home, we were to either fill the tank up with gas or pay the rental car company to fill the tank for the next people who rented the car. It was much cheaper to return the vehicle with a full tank of gas than to pay the rental company to refill the gas tank. After a week at the awesome Grand Canyon we made the return trip south to the airport in Phoenix to catch our plane.

Sometimes things do not always go the way we plan. On our way south to Phoenix we ran into a major delay on the freeway. Way ahead of us was an accident and traffic was backed up for miles and miles. We were running out of time to catch our plane! We were also getting hungry and we were running out of time to

eat dinner before boarding the airplane. There would be no food on the four-hour flight back home. My brother and I had to go to the bathroom.

When we finally arrived in Phoenix we had trouble finding our way to the rental car garage. We were tired and it was very, very hot outside. When we finally found the parking garage and drove to the place where we were to return the rental car, my brother and I left right away to find a bathroom. The parking structure was terribly hot and we needed to get out of there, soon! During all the goings-on, we forgot to fill the tank up with gas.

After we returned home my mother realized we forgot to put gas in the car. No one from the rental car company in the sweltering parking garage in Phoenix had asked if the tank was refilled. My mom contacted the rental car company by e-mail to pay the higher price to refill the gas tank. A spokesperson for the company responded that *we did not have to pay for the gasoline at all!* In life things do not always work out the way we hope they will, but God understands. Sometimes things work out even better! What matters are our intentions and that we always try to behave in a manner that gives glory to God.

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF SANCTITY

Questions For You To Answer

- ☞ In what ways are you taking responsibility for your salvation by living a holy life?
- ☞ What are some other ways you can increase your sanctity?
- ☞ Do you see your life as having great purpose?
- ☞ Are you embracing that purpose fully?
- ☞ Have you asked God to help you?

Say this prayer:

Dear God,

Please help us to embrace
Your magnificent offer
of redemption and sanctification,
made possible and obtainable by
the power of
Your great love for each of us.
May we strive to help others
in this mission we all share
through the loving service
of our apostolate.

Amen.

CHAPTER NINE

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT



Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end...And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

—John 13:2-8

*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. For I have set you an example, that
you also should do as I have done to you.”*

—John 13:12-15



Imagine in your mind what the scene was like as Jesus, a member of the Blessed Trinity, laid aside His garments, wrapped a towel around His waist, and washed the feet of His Apostles. Our Master became the servant as He lovingly placed Himself at the service of all humanity. Once again, Jesus' action opposed the customs of that time. Peter realized this, and stated, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?... You will never wash my feet."

Jesus would have it otherwise, and very clearly instructed everyone through all time with His words, "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." Jesus consistently served others throughout His life. He came to redeem and sanctify, and role-modeled the proper etiquette God desires of all people, regardless of our era, race, culture, or social standing.

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:3-8).

So far in this book we have discussed recognizing and acknowledging God's love for us. We highlighted the significant impact the apostolate of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph had and continues to have

on all humanity. We look to them as examples to follow as we, too, unite our actions with the will of God. We examined the many ways God's love entices us to faith. We also discussed making the decision to accept God's love in the many ways His love is shown, and how He awaits our love in return. We considered the role of suffering in our lives and how our sufferings and triumphs imitate Jesus' death and resurrection. Then we discussed the importance of living holy lives.

This closing chapter focuses on sharing God's love with others every day, moment by moment, through our personal apostolate. In this way we fulfill God's greatest commandment to love one another as He loves us. Multiple choices are brought together: acknowledging God's love, accepting His love, loving Him in return, and loving others. In order for our discipleship to truly follow the will of God, **each of us must acknowledge the contribution that every person makes through his or her own unique mission. To do so we must respect and defend every single person's right to life.** *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself"* (Luke 10:27).

Every apostolate begins at the moment of conception. *"For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed"* (Psalm 139: 13-16).

Before we were even born, each of us already began impacting the lives of others and contributing to their welfare. **So much good is accomplished by our very existence!** In general terms, our discipleships are fulfilled through our roles as embryos, infants, children, adolescents, adults, and senior citizens. They include what we accomplish

as students, patients, or retirees, while in training, through various occupations that are paid or unpaid, through volunteering, in sickness, and in health. More specifically, our apostolate includes the many ways we serve God each and every day, from moment to moment.

While some of us love and serve others through what we are able to do physically, our contributions are not limited to what can be seen by eyes, felt with hands, measured, heard, counted, or quoted. Our contributions may be tangible and have clearly visible results, or may be great while remaining

unseen. For example, people who are unable to care for themselves have great purpose and a vital apostolate, and we must give them every opportunity to share their gifts. They provide love in many ways and contribute greatly to society. Remarkable things are accomplished through their circumstances because they teach us compassion while fulfilling the will of God.

The effects of our apostolate do not have to be physically observable to be real. There are great contributions taking place all around us every day that cannot be seen. God's love is real. The effect He has on our lives is real. Just as real is His love resonating through the discipleship of each and every person. In His encyclical *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II stated, "The blood of Christ, while it reveals the grandeur of the Father's love, *shows how precious man is in God's eyes and how priceless the value of his life.*"¹⁷

The Christ-likeness of St. Thérèse of Lisieux provides us with a very powerful example of the effects our lives have as followers of Christ when we choose to live and serve in love. St. Thérèse wrote in

***Each of
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the
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that every
person makes
through
his or her
own unique
mission.***

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*, p. 45

Story of a Soul, “Charity gave me the key to my vocation. I understood that if the Church had a body composed of different members, the most necessary and most noble of all could not be lacking to it, and so I understood that the church had a Heart and that this Heart was BURNING WITH LOVE. I understood it was Love alone that made the Church’s members act...I understand that LOVE COMPRISED ALL VOCATIONS, THAT LOVE WAS EVERYTHING, THAT IT EMBRACED ALL TIMES AND PLACES...IN A WORD, THAT IT WAS ETERNAL!”¹⁸ Her vocation, her personal apostolate, was love.

***So much
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In conclusion, it is worth repeating:

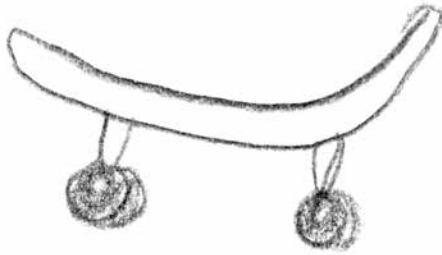
You are very, very special to God. Every single person ever created is special to God! He loves each of us immensely. Imagine how you felt during the happiest, most loving moment you have ever had. Multiply that feeling by the largest number you can think of, and you still will not even come close to how much God loves each one of us. At conception each person is gifted by God with striking uniqueness, individual talents, traits, personalities, and an apostolate that changes through life as we develop and as our circumstances change. For the sake of our sanctity and the work we accomplish in our imitation of Christ, each of us must recognize, respect, and protect the uniqueness and mutual importance of every other person’s contribution as it was intended by God.

Everyone has something to contribute, for no one was ever created without a purpose. Through our apostolate we return our treasures of self to the infinitely loving God who gave them to us in the first place. We return love for love while serving Him and His people. Our presence, thoughts, desires, words, and actions give witness to God’s love in our world. May God bless you for your efforts on His behalf and may your life bring God, you, and others great joy.

¹⁸ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 194

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Serving God and Others at the Skateboard Park



I am still a beginning skateboarder. At the skateboard park, some of the boys do not watch out for other skateboarders. One day a boy ran right into me. I told him to watch where he was going. Later he did the same thing! Just before we left, I decided to go down a big ramp.

The big ramp is straight, not curved, and goes down about five feet at a forty-five degree angle. After going down the ramp to the floor, one heads toward an even bigger, seven-foot half-pipe ramp, but must avoid a large padded pole in the middle of the floor. I am very good at those ramps and enjoy riding back and forth between them. Sometimes while going down ramps one has to watch out for rails which are moved around the floor for different maneuvers like grinding, but could be in one's way.

I went down the first ramp and was going down the second half-pipe ramp when I was hit in the back

by another boy who was skateboarding by me. I fell and landed in the splits position. My friend helped me up. We went to the front desk and reported that the boy needs to be told to be a little more careful. When I ride I try to be courteous and stay out of the way of other people. God taught us to love our neighbors. We all fail at this from time to time but get better with practice. Love God and your neighbor every day.

Skateboarding is a lot like life in general. Other skateboarders can bother you, hurt you, tease you, and get in your way, but we become closer to God when we live in imitation of Christ and choose holy ways to interact with others. There are many kind and helpful people at the skateboard park who work there or skateboard there. While skateboarding, I have the opportunity to mentor other kids, be a good example, encourage other skateboarders, and be positive as I learn and develop my skills. My apostolate involves my time at the skate park, too! Our preteen mission includes our activities and behavior while we are at school, taking lessons after school, playing, resting, playing sports, and serving God wherever we are, wherever we go, in whatever we do.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Questions For You To Answer

- ☞ How are you faithful to God's Greatest Commandment to love Him with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself?

Say this prayer:

Most Compassionate and Loving God,

Please bless us
as we seek to recognize
the many opportunities we have
to grow closer to You
and to each other
during the joys and sorrows
of our lives.

Help us to accept
Your loving offer
of salvation and sanctification,
and guide us as we
serve each other
on the journey toward heaven.

Amen.

CONCLUSION

THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE



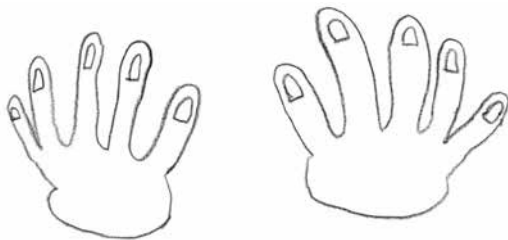
Once upon a time, God created wonderful, exciting, loving, valuable you. God created you for a reason: to know Him, love Him, and serve Him. **Your life has great purpose!** That purpose is revealed in the work of your apostolate.

Every person's apostolate is taking place at this very moment. Just as we do not stay the same through our lives, our life's work changes, too, as we make decisions based on what God asks of us. Jesus' apostolate evolved from growing in His mother's womb through His infancy, childhood, young adulthood, and adulthood. He lived His life privately until becoming well known during the three years of His public ministry. He was loved and persecuted, popular and unpopular, loved and hated, returned to Jerusalem a hero at the age of thirty-three and was crucified shortly after that. Several things remained the same through the different stages of Jesus' life: He was obedient to God and served others with great love.

Our imitation of Christ includes all we do during the different stages of our lives: as embryos, babies, children, preteens, teens, young adults, adults, and senior citizens. We may be students, employed, unemployed, stay-at-home, religious, lay people, single, married, or in transition between jobs or careers. We may be healthy or sick, abled or disabled. Our apostolate evolves through the events of our lives, the length of which should be determined by God alone. Our efforts to grow in holiness and share the love of God with one another not only help each of us individually, but benefit so many other people, including people we may never meet! Father John A. Hardon, S.J., S.T.D. stated on his audiotape, *He Will Come Again to Judge the Living and the Dead*, "No human act is sterile. We are writing history for eternity."¹⁹

Just as we benefit from God's love in so many different ways, through so many different people, we too are called through our apostolate to share God's love with others. So beautiful is His love that it will not be denied and can never be contained. God's love is extremely contagious! "*I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ*" (Philippians 1:6). Imagine the moment when you will one day stand before God and share with Him the many ways you loved Him back throughout your life, directly and by serving others in His place. How beautiful that moment will be!

The beginning.




¹⁹ Rev. John A. Hardon, S.J., S.T.D., *He Will Come Again to Judge the Living and the Dead*, audiotape.

YOUR PRETEEN APOSTOLATE: ACCEPTING AND SHARING THE LOVE OF GOD

Questions for Individual or Group Discussion

- 1 We Are Loved** + In what ways do you feel God's great love for you?
- 2 Following the Holy Family** + How do the lives of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph inspire you in your own life?
- 3 Called To Faith** + What are three things that have led you to believe and trust in God?
- 4 Accepting God's Love** + What are some of the ways that you accept God's love?
- 5 Loving God Back** + How do you love God in return?
- 6 Sharing Jesus' Passion** + Has suffering affected your service to God and others? How so?
- 7 His Resurrection and Our Journey** + What has happened in your own life that helps you relate to Jesus' resurrection?
- 8 The Crucial Role of Sanctity** + What are some things that you can do to become more holy?
- 9 The Greatest Commandment** + How do you follow God's greatest commandments to love Him with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself?

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—Nicholas Joseph Bottesi


Dear Lord, I thank you for the opportunity to love You and serve You through the power of the written word, and pray that this work is pleasing in Your sight. *Vulnera tua merita mea*. All honor and praise to You, Most High Triune God! I am grateful to Erin Howarth for her exceptional work editing and printing this book, Roseann Neiman for her graphic design expertise and friendship, and Kathy Rizzo for her fantastic photos. I also thank my daughter Alyssa and son Andre for their support and ideas. My son Nick, you have been a fantastic collaborator in this labor of love for those in your age group. Your stories, illustrations, and ideas are wonderful! May all preteens realize in greater measure how much they are loved and valued, and understand the immense contribution they make to our world. God is at work in all of you!

—Michele Elena Bondi

*“I thank my God every time
I remember you.”*

—Philippians 1:3

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Conclusion

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Each of us has an apostolate, or mission, that we carry out throughout our lives. Our apostolate does not begin when we reach a certain age or achieve a certain goal. Instead, every apostolate begins the moment a person is created and is accomplished over time, through all the events of our lives, in good times and during hardships. Our mission is fulfilled in every moment, through every day. The success of our apostolate depends upon our willingness to accept, return, and share the Love of God.

Your Preteen Apostolate: Accepting and Sharing the Love of God helps preteens understand that their efforts and contributions are important and necessary, and reminds every preteen that “God is at work in you!”



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