

Journey of Faith



In Short:



- Faith is a virtue freely given by God.
- Faith, science, and reason coexist.
- Faith grows when we're alone and part of a community.

What Is Faith?

Some people love to get lost in an adventure. Their journeys can last years and cover miles. They thrive on not knowing what will come next, who they'll meet, or where they'll end up. They don't care if they head off into their journey unprepared—planning lessens the adventure.

Other people aren't quite as ready to leave everything to chance. They make plans, figure out what they need to pack, and trace exactly where they'll go. They don't leave room for the uncertain—they don't have room on their adventure for the unexpected.

- *Do you think either of these ways is the best way to travel? Why or why not?*

- *What's the purpose of going on a journey?*
- *What kind of journey has your own life been?*



Life is a process. A journey is a process, too. Both involve growth, change, and development. When we're on a journey, we don't stay in the same place, at least not for long. We move on.

We choose new roads. We discover new things. We grow in wisdom and understanding. We mature. We are always in process.

The Journey of Faith

Faith means having certainty in God and all his works and is more certain than all human knowledge. However, having faith doesn't mean never asking questions or ignoring empirical facts. Actually, as your faith grows, so does your desire to know more about God. Faith is a grace we can't have without God, but it's also a human act. So while God can give us the grace and courage to live and act with faith, it's still up to us to take those steps (CCC 156–162). When we have faith, we live each moment knowing that God loves us, even when life seems to tell us otherwise. To have faith means to trust that nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of God.

Faith is also a process. It's the most important process and most important journey of our lives because it brings us closer to God. The more we live our faith, the closer we get to God. Being close to God brings us an inner joy and peace that can't come from anything else. We all want to feel close to God, yet the process of getting there may seem difficult, if not impossible.

Let's take a deeper look at what it means to have faith in God.

"What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?...No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us."

Romans 8:35, 37

- *What are some other things you've had faith in?*
- *Has that faith paid off? Why or why not?*



The good news is, you're not alone. There are a lot of people of faith out there, and they're struggling to live like Jesus, too. If you're able to tune out noise from the rest of the world, you'll see you're not in this alone.

- *Are there circumstances where you find it difficult to live your faith? How do you handle them?*



Sometimes even when we do have faith, we don't always feel sure of our beliefs. We shouldn't judge our closeness to God by how we feel. God is just as close to us when we're depressed, irritated, or stressed out as when we're joyful and carefree. When we're going through tough times, we can feel like God is very far away. But God's perfect love for us is always there, even in times of doubt and trouble. We cannot hide from the love of our Lord.

When we question God, we may not receive the answers we want. But that doesn't mean God isn't listening or that he doesn't care about us. God reaches out to us in our ordinary, everyday lives. God wants us to become the thinking, creative, feeling people we were created to be, and sometimes that means struggling with our faith or changing part of how we live.

In the future, when you start to worry about this thing, pray: *"I give the burden to God, I relax and let go."* Then take a deep breath and as you breathe out, know that God is taking your burden and working on it.

- *How do you handle times of fear, mistrust, or a lack of faith?*
- *Think of something that you're trying very hard to control in your life. Perhaps you struggle with a particular classmate, school subject, or family member. It could be a person, a situation, anything. Write it down.*
- *What about that situation can you give up and turn over to God?*



The teachings of the Catholic Church on faith come largely from Scripture.

Take a few moments and look up the following passages in your Bible. Then briefly write or discuss what each passage means:

Mark 9:23

Matthew 21:22

1 Peter 1:8–9

Our Personal Faith

Because faith involves trust in something that goes beyond our human understanding, it can be very difficult to accept. As a teen, you're transitioning into the adult you will become. That's a process filled with questions and doubts, a time when you question nearly everything you once believed to be true. You'll question your parents and society—their wisdom, their values, and their beliefs. You might even find yourself looking around and wondering, "Isn't there anyone else I can ask?"

It can be tempting to trade in these questions for answers, to want these mysteries of faith to be solved. You might think that having faith means you're no longer allowed to ask questions or that you have to give up your own opinions to blindly follow some Church authority. Rest assured, having faith doesn't mean we stop asking questions; it means we live like we are loved and desired by God—and that we treat others like they are, too.

When we become people of faith, we take on the values of Jesus Christ. But while living like Jesus leads us to a more authentic life, it isn't an easy lifestyle. It can seem like the world values beautiful people and expensive things over values like simple living, chastity, and sacrifice.

Called to Faith

“Now Saul, still breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, that, if he should find any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them back to Jerusalem in chains.”

Acts 9:1–2

For some, the gift of faith comes in surprising ways. One day, a man named Saul was making a journey to the town of Damascus. All of a sudden he was blinded by a flash of light and heard a voice from heaven. “He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’” (Acts 9:4). He went from someone who persecuted Christians to a follower of Jesus Christ himself and a great teacher, spreading the story of Jesus throughout his part of the world. God even changed Saul’s name to Paul as a sign of his new identity as a follower of Jesus (Acts 9:1–19).

For most of us, our faith beginning isn’t as dramatic. God is like a quiet gardener who knows where the “good soil” lies within us better than we do. God plants the first small seed. But if we want our faith to grow, we have to be active about it. Once you ask God for the gift of faith, God gives it to you freely. But we can’t just ask God to give us the gift of faith and be done with it. We have to nurture the faith he gives us. We can’t expect our faith in God to grow if we do nothing.

There’s another important element in Paul’s story, too. Once he found faith, he didn’t keep it a secret. He went out and told other people about Jesus. He spread his faith to others. You might not be called to be a missionary or an evangelist like Paul, but you are called to share your faith in some way. And the more you share your faith, the stronger it will grow.

- *What have you learned about your faith so far that you are most excited to share with others?*



Growing Our Faith

Here are some things you can do to nurture your faith:

Read

Reading Scripture (the Bible) and other spiritual writings introduces you to the great wisdom of others. Spiritual reading gives you the knowledge and strength to resist the temptation to put other things before God—like money, power, popularity, physical beauty, or drugs.

Pray

For faith to grow, you must pray on your own and with others. If we want to get to know God, we must spend time talking with God. This means making time for quiet moments. Finding time to pray is sometimes the most difficult aspect of prayer.

Live

This is another challenging part of growing in faith. If you want to live authentically, the way you live your life must match your religious ideals. You may have friends who pressure you to do things that make you feel uncomfortable or that you know are wrong. Having faith means avoiding behaviors that would lead you away from God.

Get Involved

The Catholic sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist will bring you into the life of the Church, the community of believers. As you live, work, and play with others, you come to know God, and you bring God to others. We belong to our community, and belonging helps our faith grow.

Faith



With a group or as a class, imagine your journey of faith is a real journey. What would you need to pack? What would you have to leave behind? What obstacles might you face? What places or people might you see along the way? You may write your responses in a list, draw scenes from the journey, or anything else you can think of to create.



What doubts do you have about your faith? Are there questions you still haven't answered or things you're still struggling to accept on faith? List them in your journal.

Find someone you're comfortable talking to and discuss these questions with that person.



Journey of Faith for Teens: Inquiry, Q2 (826337)

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists.

Imprimatur: "In accordance with CIC 827, permission to publish has been granted on March 29, 2016, by the Most Reverend Edward M. Rice, Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese of St. Louis. Permission to publish is an indication that nothing contrary to Church teaching is contained in this work. It does not imply any endorsement of the opinions expressed in the publication; nor is any liability assumed by this permission."

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Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Morality is ultimately ordered by Christ.
- We are called to reflect on personal choices.
- We are called to form our conscience.



“Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment.”

CCC 1776

Christian Moral Living

Evan was very close to getting his first “A” in math, a subject he had always found difficult. Two days before his final exam, he saw a copy of the test sitting on his teacher’s desk while she was out of the room. Evan was tempted to look at the first few answers so he could go into the test with confidence, even though he knew that was still cheating. But if he knew a few questions in advance, he would have a much better chance of getting that “A”....Evan was torn.

When Carrie joined her friends near the lockers before school, she heard them saying cruel things about a girl who was new to the class. At first, Carrie just listened to their comments, but soon she was joining the conversation, too. It made her feel like she was part of the group. But she also knew these stories about the new girl weren’t true. Carrie started feeling guilty. She wanted to be part of the group and if she said something or stopped hanging out they might start talking about her. But how would the new girl feel if she ever found out about the lies her classmates were spreading?

- *What would you do if you were Evan or Carrie?*
- *What would you tell a friend in a similar situation?*



We are faced with moral decisions every day. These decisions, or our choice to not do anything, develop our moral character. Who you are is defined by the decisions you make or don’t make when you’re asked to choose between right and wrong, between standing up or bowing out. Jesus tells us how important our actions are:

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.”

Matthew 7:24–27

Building your moral house on rock when you’re young gives you a strong foundation as you move into adult life. When you choose the right and honest thing consistently, it becomes a habit, and that makes it easier for you to choose the right thing the next time you’re faced with a similar option. When we form the habit of choosing honesty, truth, and love, those actions become the ones we default to when facing a problem.

CCC 1776–1832

If we fall into the habit of lying, cheating, or deceiving others to get what we want, we are building our houses on sand.

“The education of the conscience is a lifelong task....The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart.”

CCC 1784

This is where faith can get difficult. Believing in Jesus and understanding the faith are easy in comparison to actually living like Christ. As small children, it's easy to know right from wrong. But when you're faced with more complex moral issues, what's right or wrong may not be as clear, or we know what's right but struggle to follow through with those actions. Plus, the pressure we can feel from the world or friends or family members to make certain decisions makes the task of choosing right or wrong even more difficult.

Because God loves us, we have a free will. Having a **free will** means we have the freedom and power to make choices, to act or not act, to choose how we respond. God won't step in and stop us from making a wrong choice. We have to do our best to discern (make a well-informed decision) what's right and what's wrong; what's the will of God and what's selfish desire.

- How do you make difficult choices?
- Do you ever avoid making choices because you aren't sure what's right or wrong?



Our Conscience

“A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator.”

CCC 1783

We might have an image of conscience being a little angel and a little devil hovering over each shoulder while telling us what to do or not do. But our conscience is actually a part of who we are. **Conscience** is what enables us to “recognize the moral quality of a concrete act” that we're thinking about doing, in the process of doing, or have already done (CCC 1778). Conscience gives us feelings of peace when we make moral decisions or unrest when we make poor moral choices.

- Write about a time when you felt contentment and joy because you did the right thing.
- Write about a time when you felt uneasy or anxious because you did the wrong thing.



It's important to get into the habit of listening to our conscience, and to be sensitive to how we feel after we have made a difficult choice. Our conscience is subtle. It softly urges us to act as God would want us to act. When we are aware of our consciences and act on what it tells us, we are building that firm foundation written about in Matthew's Gospel.

Unfortunately, we can also get into the habit of ignoring our consciences. We can also miss the quiet voice of our consciences if we don't take time to be quiet and listen. When we're constantly surrounded by the noise of the world, we can miss the gentle voice of conscience inside us. This is where a strong prayer life can help us stay on the right path. Without the quiet and solitude necessary for prayerful reflection and clear thinking, it can be very difficult to discern right from wrong when we are faced with moral decisions.

- What are some ways you can step back from the world and get in touch with your conscience?



Conscience and the Bible

“In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path; we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord’s Cross.”

CCC 1785

Once we decide to take the time (or make the time) to come to know God’s will, we can begin our search with sacred Scripture. Jesus promises us, “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him” (John 14:23). These are wonderfully reassuring words. They tell us that if we make Jesus the center of our lives and use his words and actions as our guide, we will know the best way to live. We will not be perfect. We’ll fail sometimes and make bad choices, but Jesus won’t give up on us. He dwells within us and will work to bring us back on track.

The moral teaching of Jesus includes understanding and obeying the **commandments** of the Old Testament. The Ten Commandments were accepted by the Jews in Jesus’ time as God’s will. They were given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1–21; Deuteronomy 5:1–21). They have remained the standards of morality for generations.

After the Israelites escaped from slavery in Egypt, God gave them the commandments to keep them from falling into a worse form of slavery—slavery to sin. When we lie, steal, or take another’s life, we can’t be truly free. We can’t experience full human joy. The great value of the commandments can be seen if we ask ourselves the simple question, “What would the world be like tomorrow if everyone kept the Ten Commandments?”

- How do you think the world would be different if everyone followed the Ten Commandments?



The Moral Teachings of Jesus

[Jesus said] “But what comes out of a person, that is what defiles. From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly.”

Mark 7:20–22

Jesus did more than affirm the Ten Commandments. He challenged us to aim for an even higher standard—a morality based on love. Jesus questioned old beliefs that allowed hatred and revenge. He told us it was not enough to follow the law if our hearts were full of anger and hatred.

Jesus was urging us to move beyond legalism—obeying a list of laws—to a morality that truly fosters love. When we choose to obey the speed limits, we should do so out of respect for the safety and well-being of others—not simply because it’s the law and we don’t want a ticket. When we choose to avoid saying something untrue about another person, we should be motivated by our love and respect for the children of God—not just the need to obey the Ten Commandments.

Conscience and the Church

Catholics believe that we have another resource to help us form good consciences—the teachings of the Church. Jesus is present in his Church and has given its leaders the authority to speak and act in his name. New Testament Christians looked to their leaders for guidance in moral questions, like when the Corinthians wrote to Paul for advice (1 Corinthians 7:1). All New Testament letters offered moral guidance, and some gave rules of conduct in matters of Church organization, relationships with one another, and daily life.

Since then, the Catholic Church has provided moral leadership for its members through laws and instruction from pastors, bishops, and popes. Church leaders strive to understand and teach how the Gospel applies to modern life.

Catholics trust that Church leaders continue to be guided by the Holy Spirit. As we seek to make good moral choices, it's important to know the moral teachings of the Church and, more importantly, to understand the reasons behind these teachings. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a great place to start if you have questions on Church teaching, but your sponsor or parish priest can be great resources, too.

Forming Your Conscience

When we are faced with moral decisions, there are several steps we can take to make sure our consciences are well-formed:

1. Take the time or make the time for prayerful reflection. Make sure you can hear the small voice within.
2. Know and understand the Ten Commandments, and then ask yourself, "What would be the morally right thing to do?"
3. Know and understand the teachings of the Church. If a Church teaching is confusing, don't be afraid to discuss that issue with a priest or well-informed Catholic.
4. If you make a mistake, seek forgiveness and grow from what you've learned.

With a partner, make up a scenario that would require you to make a difficult choice.

Work through steps 1 to 4 under "Forming Your Conscience" and come up with a way to handle that scenario. Share with the rest of the group.

Recall a time when you did something wrong that you later regretted.

If you were faced with that situation again, how would you respond?



Journey of Faith for Teens: Catechumenate, C13 (826290)

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists.

Imprimatur: "In accordance with CIC 827, permission to publish has been granted on March 29, 2016, by the Most Reverend Edward M. Rice, Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese of St. Louis. Permission to publish is an indication that nothing contrary to Church teaching is contained in this work. It does not imply any endorsement of the opinions expressed in the publication; nor is any liability assumed by this permission."

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Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Christians have reacted in many ways to Jesus' message of discipleship throughout history.
- As members of the elect, you are called to discipleship.
- As you grow in your faith, you will be asked to engage in self-examination.



Election: Saying "Yes" to Jesus

Maria is twenty years old and the mother of an active two-year-old boy. She works forty hours a week but still struggles to make ends meet. She left high school during her senior year.

Maria's parents begged her to remain in school, and her favorite teacher tried to convince her of the benefits of hitting the books and toughing it out. But Maria wasn't convinced. Working in the real world seemed to be the smartest choice. She'd still learn, but she'd also be making money and getting work experience.

Now Maria is beginning to wonder what would have happened if she'd said "yes" to finishing high school. It will be difficult to go back to school now that she's a mom with more adult responsibilities, but she feels called to say "yes" to this opportunity now. It won't be easy, but she still has her family's support for a new life experience she knows will help her.

- Have you ever said "no" to something only to find yourself saying "yes" to it later? Briefly describe the situation and what changed.



Jesus invited many to become his disciples and to carry on his mission after him. As the Gospels tell us, many responded enthusiastically—including some Galilean fishermen, tax collectors, and women. People from every walk of life accepted Jesus' call to come and follow him.

Not everyone said "yes" to Jesus, though. **Discipleship**—being a follower of Jesus—isn't easy. It requires a big commitment and saying "yes" to things not everyone was ready for. While being a follower of Jesus comes with all the blessings of eternal life, it's a decision that can't be made without some understanding of what it means. It's better for us to give an authentic, thoughtful "yes" to God than a halfhearted "yes" that means we just go through the motions.

- Can you think of some reasons people give for saying 'no' to their faith? Why did you choose to say 'yes?'



Rite of Election: An Opportunity for Commitment

"From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him...to lead others to the 'yes,' of faith in Jesus Christ. But at the same time the need to know this faith better makes itself felt."

CCC 429

On the first Sunday of Lent or close to the beginning of Lent, the catechumens celebrate the rite of election. Election comes from a word that means choose, and the whole ceremony reflects this theme. God has chosen us and called us. How have you responded to that call?

After the Church community hears **testimony**, that is, public statements from the catechumens and their sponsors on how the catechumens have chosen to respond to God's call, the community is then asked to accept those catechumens who are ready to receive the sacraments. The catechumens say "yes" by stating their desire to join the Church and then writing their names in the **Book of the Elect**.

The rite of election begins the stage of purification and enlightenment, the final stage of the journey for catechumens and candidates. You've asked questions about the Church, and you've become part of the community. Now it's time for you to examine your life and to think about what Christ asks of you.

At the time of Jesus, some said "yes" to his call, while others said, "no, not yet." What made the difference?

Today Christ has called you. How will you respond? As you reflect on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, have you ever used any of the following excuses when you felt Jesus' call?

"I will, but first..."

"Desire for true happiness frees man from his immoderate attachment to the goods of this world so that he can find his fulfillment in the vision and beatitude of God."

CCC 2548

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke both describe Jesus' invitation to potential disciples who say they desire to follow him but not just yet: "Lord, let me go first and bury my father" (Matthew 8:21). In Jesus' time, this meant "let me come after my father is dead." In Luke's Gospel, the hesitant disciple says, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home" (Luke 9:61).

To us, Jesus' response may seem cold and harsh: "Let the dead bury their dead...No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60,62). But what the Gospel writer is trying to tell us is that we can't follow Christ only when it fits into our schedule. We aren't true disciples of Jesus if we live as disciples only when it's safe and convenient. We have to follow the Lord's commands when we're out with our friends and when we're at home with our parents. True followers of Christ aren't part-time, only-when-no-one's-looking disciples.

When we accept Jesus' call we must do so enthusiastically, making it our top priority. The Galilean fishermen "left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:11). Matthew, the tax collector, "leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him" (Luke 5:28). Our family, relationships, hobbies, and activities, all take on their true meaning in our lives only when following Christ is our first priority.

"Some of Jesus' teachings are just too hard to follow."

"The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just."

CCC 1733

When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, he said many things that would have been hard for her to hear (John 4:18). But Jesus promised her "living water" that would keep her from ever thirsting again.

The Samaritan woman could have reacted with embarrassment, resentment, or anger. Jesus was asking her to radically change her life. But she didn't get upset or defensive. She ran back to her town to tell people Jesus was the Messiah. While the truth is often difficult for us to hear, we, like the Samaritan woman, must be open to receiving it.

"But I have so much stuff."

Of all Jesus' conversations with would-be disciples, maybe the one we can relate to best is the one with the rich young man who asked, "'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?...?' Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, 'You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions" (Mark 10:17–22).

In this conversation, Jesus is telling us that it's not good to become too attached to things. If we look to our stuff for happiness, we will always be aching for something more, something that really matters.

The rich young man couldn't let go of the false security of his possessions. He wasn't sure that he would find in Jesus, and within himself, something more valuable than his wealth.

This story challenges us to ask ourselves, "What things do I hold on to that may keep me from following the Lord? What do I own that is more important to me than God? More important than other people?"

"I do not know him."

Probably the saddest loss for Jesus came when, after his arrest, his closest friends ran away. Peter, who had sworn he would die with Jesus, denied three times that he even knew Jesus.

Many of Jesus' disciples thought he would lead Israel to glory and bring about an earthly kingdom. They weren't prepared for the truth of the cross.

It's easy to understand how frightened they were! None of the Twelve, except perhaps John, attended Jesus' crucifixion or burial. Just when Jesus needed them the most, they ran away and locked themselves in a room because they were afraid.

But not everyone ran in fear. "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala" (John 19:25). No matter what the danger, these women stayed by Jesus. These brave women stayed by him and later went out to the tomb to anoint his body (Matthew 28:1–10).

• *Is it easier for you to follow Jesus when it's the popular decision or your prayers are being answered the way you expect? Why?*

• *Have you ever said "no" to a cross Jesus asked you to bear? Why? Is it a decision you'd change if you could?*



Our Response to Jesus' Call

Jesus must have felt very sad as he listened to all these excuses, as he watched all the would-be disciples turn and leave him. Many of them almost said "yes," but out of fear or attachment to things, they said "no" to the only one who could give lasting purpose and direction to their lives.

Our prayers and practices during Lent help us discover the strengths and weaknesses of our own responses to Christ's call. There is a little bit of the *would-be* disciple in each of us. It's difficult to give an unconditional "yes" to Christ—to embrace the cross that he asks us to carry with him. But Jesus didn't abandon his disciples. He sent them the graces they needed to say yes again. God won't force us into discipleship, but he will answer when we say, "yes, but help!"

With a partner or as a group, list as many excuses for following Jesus as you can think of in two minutes. Then pick a gift or fruit of the Holy Spirit that helps overcome that excuse, and explain how. (Gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit are listed in sections 1831–32 of the CCC.)



What keeps you from following Christ more completely or consistently? Use the excuses discussed in the lesson to help you evaluate yourself as honestly as possible.



Journey of Faith for Teens: Enlightenment, E1 (826313)

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists.

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Liguori
PUBLICATIONS
A Redemptorist Ministry

Printed in the United States of America. 20 19 18 17 16 / 5 4 3 2 1. Third Edition.



Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Conversion is a lifelong process.
- God's grace and continued perseverance are needed for spiritual growth.
- Participation is an important part of our community faith.



- What role do you see your faith playing in your life?
- How will your life be different because of it?



Mountaintops and Valleys

"The soul of one who serves God always swims in joy, always keeps holiday, and is always in the mood for singing."

St. John of the Cross

You may be feeling what St. John of the Cross described. You may also be experiencing other feelings:

"I felt such a spiritual high during the Easter Vigil. But now everything else seems so...ordinary."

"I feel like I've graduated. I guess I don't have to keep coming to these meetings."

"I feel kind of confused. I spent so much energy preparing for initiation into the Church. Now what do I do?"

"I really love my new faith, but I still have questions. Maybe I should have waited."

Even the apostles weren't swimming in joy all the time. Peter experienced Jesus' transfiguration in person (Matthew 17:1-9) and wanted to stay on that mountaintop—but he had to come down. The joy of that mountaintop experience must have faded into the background as the apostles witnessed Jesus' suffering and death.

Conversion: A Lifelong Process

Welcome! You're now a fully initiated member of the Catholic Church.

The Easter Vigil isn't the end of your formation as a Catholic. It actually marks the beginning of your commitment to learning more about and living out the Catholic Christian message. Your journey continues.

The next stage of the RCIA process is called **mystagogy**, a Greek word meaning "mystery." The early Church used the fifty days from Easter to Pentecost to explain the mystery of the sacraments celebrated at Easter. Today this post-Easter period serves a similar purpose. It's a time for **neophytes** (the newly baptized) to gain a deeper understanding of God's word, the sacraments, and what their new commitment means for their lives.

As you explore mystagogy, your focus will shift from learning about the faith to living the faith. You'll recommit to the Church every day you choose to live like Jesus.

Whether you're still on that spiritual high or the newness is fading as you get back to life as usual, hold on to your desire to continue learning about the mysteries of faith. This is part of your ongoing conversion.

Ongoing Conversion

At its root, conversion means "to change or turn around." **Conversion** is the ever-present call of the Christian to grow in faith and to live out that faith. It means deepening our relationship with God and our fellow Christians.

The first step in the conversion process is to turn to Jesus Christ, accept him as Lord and Savior, and choose to live the life of faith in the community of God's people. This first step is called **initial conversion**. It may be a moving experience, a dramatic moment, or something that moves you deep in your soul. Or it may be subtle, a change that happens gradually.


- *Reflect on your own initial conversion. What was the turning point that made you want to know more? When did you know you were on the right path?*

Conversion is a process that requires nurturing and the right atmosphere to continue growing. Even Jesus' apostles continued to change and grow in faith after their initial conversion.

James and John were looking for a warrior king like those of the Old Testament who would rally the people, gather an army, and drive out the Romans. But Jesus came as the "suffering servant" (see Isaiah 53) and called his apostles "not to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:28). This wasn't at all what they expected, but as they followed Jesus they discovered that his mission of salvation was greater than any mission of conquest they had imagined.

Indeed, Christ invited people to faith and conversion, but he never coerced them. "For he bore witness to the truth but refused to use force to impose it on those who spoke against it. His kingdom...grows by the love with which Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws men to himself."

CCC 160

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- *Have you ever experienced something that was better than you expected?*
 - *How have your expectations of the Church changed as you've grown in faith?*
 - *Has anything you've experienced in the Church been better than you expected?*


How Will Ongoing Conversion Affect My Life?

In the eighteenth century, Alphonsus Liguori, an ambitious young lawyer, was handling a complicated case between two Italian dukes. When he lost the case through deception, his whole world collapsed. He stormed out of the courtroom saying, "World, I know you now."

A few weeks later, after an argument with his domineering father, he walked into a church and heard a voice saying, "Alphonsus, give yourself to me." He went up the street to the church of Our Lady of Ransom and placed his sword, the symbol of his nobility, on one of the side altars—symbolizing his decision to turn his life over to God.

But this wasn't the end of his conversion. Three years later, the young man was ordained a priest, the next step in his journey of faith. Then, while vacationing with four other priests on the Amalfi Coast, a sudden storm forced them to shore and they took refuge in a hermitage called St. Mary's of the Mountain. Alphonsus was overwhelmed with the poverty of the townspeople and dedicated himself to serving the poor of the country district. The death of his friend and teacher, Bishop Falcoia, led Alphonsus to take on the role of leader.

The process of conversion continued throughout St. Alphonsus Liguori's life. It's the same for us. God calls us to use our gifts and talents to bring love and truth to our world, and we'll be offered many opportunities for grace and continued conversion.

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- *How is God calling you to conversion in your everyday life?*
 - *What can you add to your life to continue growing closer to God?*

Conversion Happens Every Day

“Then [Jesus] told them a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.”

Luke 18:1

Conversion is a process that takes place every day. Your initial conversion has already taken place. Now it's up to you to make sure the process doesn't stop. Luckily, the Church has given you the tools you need to keep going.

You've learned a lot about prayer during your RCIA sessions. Now it's up to you to use what you've learned. You may not be able to make time for Mass every day (although it's worth trying!). But that doesn't mean you don't have time for any prayer at all. You can offer up a quick prayer for patience when you feel frustrated or thanksgiving when something good happens. You can sacrifice something simple, like listening to music in the car to fit in a decade of the rosary or just some quiet time talking to God in your own words.

“Pray constantly’ (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It is always possible to pray. It is even a vital necessity. Prayer and Christian life are inseparable.”

CCC 2757

You can also foster conversion by getting involved in the work of your faith community. We serve the people of God when we become active in parish choirs or music ensembles or when we become lectors or greeters.

“As the work of Christ liturgy is also an action of his Church. It makes the Church present and manifests her as the visible sign of the communion in Christ between God and men. It engages the faithful in the new life of the community and involves the ‘conscious, active, and fruitful participation’ of everyone.”

CCC 1071

You also have unique gifts that enable you to serve your community. If you excel at sports, you might become a coach for a community team. If you have a passion for sharing what you know, you can volunteer your time as a tutor. If you feel called to be the hands of Christ, you could volunteer in a soup kitchen. There are limitless possibilities to share your new faith and the love of Christ in your community.

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

James 2:14–17

- What would happen to your faith if you stopped all faith-related activities after receiving the sacraments of initiation?
- What would happen if everyone went out and lived faith as vibrantly and publicly as Jesus did?



I Thought I'd Have It All Figured Out

Still have questions about your new faith? Welcome to the club! It's nearly impossible for any thinking, active Catholic to go through life without any questions about his or her faith. It's part of the conversion process. Jesus didn't kick out his apostles when they had questions or doubts. He taught them.

Having faith means not knowing with certainty but still believing. Having a relationship with God and the Church means having somewhere to turn with our questions. We might not always get the answers we expect or want, we might not get the answers society tells us are correct, but we're not alone.

“Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

John 20:29

With a partner or as a group, create a list of things you can do when you have questions about your faith. Be as specific as possible and save this list where you can go back to it.



What about the ongoing conversion process sounds exciting to you? Why? What sounds scary or intimidating? Why?



Journey of Faith for Teens: Mystagogy, M1 (826320)

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists.

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ISBN 978-0-7648-2632-0

