

COURSE OUTLINE: Catholic Identity: Celebrate the Difference

Presented by Father Christopher M. Walsh

Session One: A Catholic Understanding of the Human Person

Song: Amazing Grace

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me....
I once was lost but now am found, Was blind, but now, I see.

T'was Grace that taught...my heart to fear. And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear...the hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares...we have already come.
T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far...and Grace will lead us home.

The Lord has promised good to me...His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be...as long as life endures.

Reading from Sacred Scripture: Genesis 1,1-2,3

Moment of Quiet Reflection

Communal Prayer: Psalm 8

O LORD, our Lord, how awesome is your name through all the earth!
You have set your majesty above the heavens!
Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have drawn a defense against
your foes, to silence enemy and avenger.
When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and stars that you set in place.
What are humans that you are mindful of them,
mere mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them little less than a god,
crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them rule over the works of your hands,
put all things at their feet:
All sheep and oxen, even the beasts of the field,
The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatever swims
the paths of the seas.
O LORD, our Lord, how awesome is your name through all the earth!

Review and Discussion of Pre-Reading Material

- US Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapter One
 - What are you looking for in life? What are your goals and ideals? How do God and the Church play a part in what you are seeking? How is your life a journey toward God? Please share your thoughts with a partner.

Lecture

- To have a healthy understanding of the human person is crucial for us as Catholics.
- TRUTH #1: The Human Person is Created in the Image & Likeness of God
 - These words come from the story of creation in Genesis; they are familiar to us but what do they mean?
 - To be created in the image of God means three things for the Catholic: We have an intellect, we have free will and we have the ability to determine our own destiny.
 - Intellect
 - Free Will
 - Self-Determination
 - We also believe we are created in God's likeness. To be created in God's likeness means that we were created to be people of love.
- TRUTH #2: The Human Person has a Body that is to be Respected
 - Our body is good.
 - Our culture doesn't seem to have a proper understanding of the human body. (Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 2288-2289)
- TRUTH #3: The Human Person has a Soul:
 - Part of our being created in the image of God is that we have a soul and that the soul is eternal – it will live forever.
 - Our understanding of the soul predates Christ and is built upon the foundation laid by philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Socrates – all of whom had a sense that the soul left the body at death and went to an eternal punishment or an eternal reward.
- TRUTH #4: The Human Person is Called to Community
 - Genesis tells us “it is not good for the man to be alone”.
 - Man was created with a need for others; a dependence on others for our fulfillment.
 - The individualism and selfishness of our time violate the nature of the human person.

(10–minute discussion plus 15 minutes for sharing and break)

- TRUTH #5: The Human Person is Called to be a Moral Being
 - There is right and wrong; we can know what is right.
 - We MUST reject the relativism of our time.
 - We believe in conversion – people can change.
- TRUTH #6: The Human Person has a Capacity for Reason & Knowledge
 - We live in a culture that increasingly sees faith as unreasonable – to some almost silly - yet the reality is that our faith is reasonable.
 - Reject what is called “emotivism” – simply following our feelings or emotions about things.
- TRUTH #7: The Human Person as a Steward of Creation
 - Pets can be a good thing; they can teach us a great deal.

- Animals are not the same as people. Animals act on instinct; people think.
- God gave us the use of creation. It is permissible for us to use animals. However, we must do so as stewards, with great care and never abuse.

- TRUTH #8: Our Destiny in Glory

- Conclusion
 - These are tough times for the human family, yet we are hopeful!
 - In his book, *Letters to a Young Catholic*, George Weigel writes:
“Optimism and pessimism are mere matters of optics, of how you look at things, and that can change from day to day, or with a new prescription for your glasses -- or with a new set of ideological filters.”

Discussion Questions

- What is one particular insight on the human person that you have gained?
- Where do you see the dignity of the person under attack in our society?
- Why is a Catholic Understanding of the human person important for your role as a teacher or parish catechist?
- Other questions, comments or need for clarification that you may have?

Closing Comments

Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes* #22: *The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown.*

Closing Prayer

The Litany for the Sanctity of Human Life (Bethany Christian Services)

Leader: God formed man from the dust of the earth.

R: We praise God for His gift of life to man and woman.

Leader: God breathed into man the breath of life.

R: The gift of life is precious in the sight of God.

Leader: Man became a living being filled with the Holy Spirit.

R: God formed man and woman in His own image from the dust of the earth.

Leader: Life is sanctified and held holy by all who believe in God.

R: The gift of life is precious and holy in His sight.

Leader: We praise God for the gift of life and for the courage to embrace it, protect it, and honor it.

**R: We offer prayers of thanksgiving to honor the Sanctity of Human Life.
We ask God to bless all who bring life into the world. Amen.**