

Virtue-Based Redemptive Discipleship

Session One: Redemption

Imagine heading to the store to buy essentials for your household. Your work hours have been cut, leaving you short on funds, but you need some items that simply can't wait until payday. It's an uncomfortable feeling and you are nervously calculating the price of each item you place in the shopping cart to be sure it will not cause you to be overdrawn at the bank. You pick up that carton of your favorite ice cream flavor that clearly is a guilty pleasure rather than a bare necessity. You look at it longingly, then slowly place it back in the freezer, thinking, "Maybe next month..."

You check off everything on your list and head to the checkout counter. As you begin placing your items on the conveyer belt, you realize the full gravity of spending down your balance with little room for error. You glance up at the person finishing ahead of you, and you are greeted with a smile as that person tucks her wallet into her purse and heads toward the door with her groceries. The cashier, too, smiles as he begins to scan your items and places them in the bag. \$25, \$40, \$80...its as though your heart is beating to the sound of the register in fast, erratic beep, beep, beep-beep-beeps.

When the final total is calculated, you reach for your wallet as the cashier places the last bag in your cart. He smiles and says, "You have no balance due. That person ahead of you paid for your groceries today." You are stunned. You just stand there, cash in hand and a million thoughts running through your head, certain that you misunderstood what was just said. Overwhelmed with emotion, you tear up, speechless. "Have a nice day. Thanks for shopping with us today," he says as he begins to help the customer behind you. What now? How will you respond to this incredible act of charity?

Redemption: The price has been paid. Mercy: Compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm.

When was the last time you surprised someone with an unexpected favor, or gave a child a hug instead of a scolding?

Human beings need love the most when they are the most unlovable.

Isn't this true for you? When you are irritable because things aren't going your way, has anyone ever offered you redemption by asking how to help you, or asking what is wrong? What about being afraid? Has anyone helped you through a frightening time when perhaps you deserved a harsh reprimand or consequence for an error but someone recognized a need for mercy and redemption rather than punishment and isolation? Isn't this the reason God sent Jesus to earth – because He knew we needed the virtue of Christian charity in our unlovable, human condition? We were making a mess of things here on earth and needed a redemptive savior!

Then "he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more" (Revelation 21:4)

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Consider Zacchaeus, the little man who walked among the wealthy Pharisees. Imagine you had been stealing money from a group of people who planned a gathering for Jesus along his route to Jerusalem (Mark 10.46–11.1), and you were found unfavorable and perhaps hated for your criminal behavior as a tax collector. This describes Zacchaeus. Jericho, a vacationer's dream spot, was an oasis for the wealthy. In fact, Herod built his winter home here. What was this crooked little tax collector doing in their haven? He, in fact, also wanted to see Jesus. He climbed into a tree, perhaps heavy with foliage that could hide him, but could provide a good spot from which to see the distinguished guest in a large crowd.

Zacchaeus, after Jesus shows unimaginable love and mercy, bursts forth with the announcement that he will give half of his goods to the poor and will restore fourfold to anyone from whom he collected more taxes than were owed. This justice is not imposed by Jesus, but rather comes from a converted, transformed heart that experienced deep, redemptive mercy from a loving Jesus. It's the person who paid your grocery tab. He became a convert! (What can you say about "converts" you know in your church?) Our Christian call depends on our Zacchaeus-like response. We, too, must see to it that our response to God's mercy in our lives makes us better for others. Christianity is telling the story over and over again while living a life of ongoing conversion because Jesus has redeemed us.

- **Virtue Connection:** Christian Charity (Divine Love) changes the future because of what happens in the present moment of experiencing love in action. It is the greatest of all virtues, and when virtues become verbs, we see God in the actions that cause a *re-action* within us. When we respond with mercy and redemption, our *re-action* continues the action of that virtue. Virtue, a holy habit that imitates God and leads us to heaven (CCC 1802), changes us from the inside out, and it changes the world around us, always for the good of all.
- **Saints of Virtue:** St. Marie Goretti was recognized for.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TZP1Xa9vys&feature=youtu.be>
- **Restorative Connection:** The field of Restorative Practices has application in everyday circumstances, and the story of Zacchaeus stands as a reminder of redemption. To be restorative demands that we give justice – what is due – to others. Justice “disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good.” (CCC 1807)

So often we seek revenge, brood over injuries, or hold others hostage with our gossip and unforgiveness. This is contrary to restorative processes and is rejection of our Christian call. Living restoratively, and living like people whose debt has been paid invites our everyday experiences to become moments of transformation and conversion. Think of the Wise Men who were guided by the Star to the infant Jesus – *they went home by another way*. It is also true for us that we must be changed and *take our lives in a new direction* because we are transformed by the power of God's love. We cannot be silenced and are meant to share the Good News with others. This is our call to Evangelization. Zacchaeus knew that this deep love shown by Jesus had to be given

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away freely if he was to live out his own redemption from a life as a corrupt tax collector.

Restorative questions that can be transformative in any situation:

- What happened (rather than, “What did you do?”)
- What did you think when that happened to you? (ask target of harm)
- What did you think when you did that?
- What needs to happen next?
- What is the hardest thing?
- Is there a place for virtue in this situation? How would that work?
- What virtue did you practice when you chose that action? (for a positive choice only)
- How can we work this out so we both get what we need?

Reflect on parish life, school experiences, as catechists. How are you affected after reading this material?

- *When have you been given the gift of mercy when you least expected or deserved it? How were you changed?*
- *Who is someone in need of your mercy now?*
- *How can you allow yourself to be converted by mercy and redemption to change the future of this relationship?*
- *Make a commitment and a plan, but begin first with a prayer about the circumstance.*

Action: Read Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part III, Life in Christ, the Virtues

How is virtue applied in your daily life intentionally? This week, make a note of the virtues – or holy habits – you observe around you. Log and reflect on at least one each day, and share what happens to the receiver of the action. Note what changes around us as we activate good habits.