

Virtue-Based Redemptive Discipleship

Session Two: Four Guiding Principles

Have you ever been driving and caught off guard as you looked up to see the flashing lights of a police car behind you? You mentally scroll through the rules of the road as you pull over and breathe a sigh of relief. The police car passes you by in pursuit of a car further up the road.

How often are we mentally recalling the “rules” for nearly every situation? We walk into church, remember to look for the Holy Water and make the Sign of the Cross; find our pew and genuflect; know when to sit, stand, or kneel during Mass, and in school there is no yelling or running in the halls. The list goes on and on. But what are the “rules” for getting into Heaven? Is there a list?

The Ten Commandments are a great start. They steer us in the right direction by stating what we cannot do...Thou shall not kill, or steal, or covet... But if we are to live as virtue-based redemptive disciples, what *can* we do, and what’s in it for us? Rather than the demands of commandments, this unit provides *Four Guiding Principles* that lead to a life of joy.

REFLECTION ON GOODNESS:

Call to mind a person in your life who inspired you to be the person of good character you are today. Take a deep breath in and recall that person.

Who is it? A parent, a grandparent, or a friend, relative, or admired colleague?

Think of the name. Write it down.

Now in another deep breath, what is one quality of goodness that person modeled that inspired goodness in you?

Write the quality of goodness in that person, and write a sentence or two about how you have been affected by that goodness.

Here’s an example: For me, it is my husband. He shows unconditional love.

If you are in a room with others, share two words with your elbow partner: the person and the quality. If you are alone, write these two words on your paper and read them out loud to yourself. If you are on Zoom, unmute yourself and share the name and the quality. (Pause here to hear some responses.)

When we hear the name and the goodness, it affects us, right? Our hearts feel a little lighter, maybe we smile, or maybe we tear up a bit over a fond memory of that person who is no longer with us.

That quality is probably something that was a habit in the person’s life, and has inspired us to also take on a habit of goodness. What quality did it inspire in you? Maybe you have adopted that quality or were inspired to cultivate another quality that has become a habit for yourself.

We all have habits, right? We are quick to name our bad habits of leaving a mess in the kitchen, or criticizing others, and gossiping or negative thinking. But what if we spent our time focusing on habits for human excellence? By remembering people in our lives who showed good habits, we can shift our thinking into more positive ways by accentuating the positive.

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Our Catechism or the Catholic Church defines Virtues as, **“Holy habits that imitate God and lead us to Heaven.”** Holy habits are the good qualities we practice, such as patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. What if we committed ourselves to living these good habits, or virtues?

Here are Four Guiding Principles for being a Virtue-Based Redemptive Disciple:

1. We **commit to one virtue each year**, and commit to knowing habits of virtue.
2. We **support others in their journey with virtue**. “I noticed you were very patient with Dannelle. Great job!”
3. The third Guiding Principle challenges us to **commit to being constructive**. Nowhere in scripture do we read that Jesus gossiped – “Can you believe that Peter? He denied me three times. That’s it for him!” No, Jesus gave Peter a gaze of mercy, and Peter himself knew from simply a gaze that he had let his companion down. Jesus forgave him and gave Peter the task of building his church.
4. The last Guiding Principle provides a model for conflict transformation: **When we face conflicts and challenges, virtue will be the way forward for ourselves and others**. Rather than seeing the people with whom you struggle in a negative way, see them as a virtue waiting to be practiced. When we live Guiding Principle #3, it is easy to understand this last one. What virtue can I bring into this conversation about the problem I’m having with others. This transforms our relationships with others to become more Christlike rather than simply trying to resolve a conflict. This is conflict transformation.

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13

Saints of Virtue – View the Video on Teen Saint, Carlo Acutis:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XoPbvNSRiY&feature=youtu.be>

- **Virtue Connection:** 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. How did virtue affect the life of Carlo? How did it affect others around him?
- **The Restorative Nature of Jesus - questions that can be transformative in any situation:**
In restorative justice, practitioners focus on *past, present, and future*. The questions used in restorative conferences between parties responsible for harm and those who have been harmed are: 1. What injustice happened (past); 2. What will be done to restore equity (present) and; 3. What can be done to prevent harm in the future (future).

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- Jesus knows our transgressions before we can even name them. Jesus gives us power in the present to change our circumstance. Jesus promises a future full of hope and eternal life. Past, present, future.
- If Virtue is the hope of heaven, then restorative practices is the car that moves us through life to our heavenly home.

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

What would be different about you and those around you if you applied the Four Guiding Principles?

Action: Write a note to the person who inspired you. If that person is no longer living, share the note with a family member or friend. Pray for continued outpouring of grace for that person, and for yourself. Using the restorative process, talk about the past, present, and future of that influence, letting others know you are changed.

Read in Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part III, Life in Christ – the Virtues. Reflect on them and begin praying to discern God’s will for virtue in your life. Write your reflections and prepare to share them in the next session.