

SESSION 1 / CREATED IN LOVE, MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).

Theme In the Book of Genesis we learn the roots of the story of our rescue from sin. Made in God's image, both body and soul, we are created in love to be in relationship with God. This relationship was first broken through the original sin of Adam and Eve. Christ rescues us on the cross, and at our Baptism we are cleansed of original sin.

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (15 mins)

O God,
send forth your Holy Spirit
into our hearts that we might perceive,
into our minds that we might remember,
into our souls that we might meditate.
Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,
tenderness and mercy.
Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses
from beginning to end.
May your grace help us to see with your eyes
and to act with your love and light in our hearts.
May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high
for the sake and glory of your kingdom.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

We join together in praying the Apostles' Creed (page 48)

Read the Word Genesis 1:26-27, 2:15-17 (5 mins)

A variety of short prayers before the reading of Scripture can be found on page 46.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Meditate on the Word Genesis 1:26-27, 2:15-17 (20 mins)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way might my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture change me?

How might it help me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

While mirrors readily offer us images of our external features, specialised equipment used by medical imaging professionals enable us to see our internal organs, even to joyfully glimpse a yet unborn infant. The sonogram machine was developed in the middle of the 20th Century while the CAT scan machine is an even more recent invention that facilitates even more detailed visualisation of bones, organs and the like. These machines are calibrated by teams of mathematicians and computer scientists who develop algorithms to fine tune software that makes the invisible increasingly clearer, more visible.

While we may rarely think of these technological advancements until we need medical attention, the idea of imaging is certainly not a new phenomenon. In fact, it was part of God's plan from the very beginning, for we are created in love in his image and likeness. St Thomas Aquinas calls the creative work of God, as set out in Genesis, 'the ladder of being'. Starting from the lowest rung, there are rocks, plants, and animals, and at the highest rungs we find human beings and God. God gave men and women a body to experience with wonder and amazement the beauty of the world. Work was not yet a burden but a collaboration with God in perfecting the visible creation (CCC 378).

This is all a part of the special status God gives us: the gift of his own image. God makes us 'in his image and likeness' (Genesis 1:27). This is why every human being is not a thing, but a someone. God also gives us all an interior life: an intellect and will. We can reason and freely choose and because of our reason and intellect we have the ability to know the truth, desire the good and act accordingly. Our bodies make visible what is invisible. Our bodies are an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality, our soul.

God creates us in love and he invites us to love him in return. We are the only creature he invites into this relationship of love, to enter into communion with God and with others. Adam and Eve shared this communion with God and each other; they were able to see the interior life of each other as they walked in the garden in the cool of the day. As man and woman, Adam and Eve walked 'without shame' in perfect harmony with God and each other.

But the book of Genesis does not end there, the order and goodness God creates descends into the drama of sin when Adam and Eve consciously chose to turn away from God. By their external actions, their disobedience to God's command not to eat from the tree of knowledge, their hearts are corrupted, and sin enters the world. The harmony they shared with God was lost and they no longer reflected God's image as they were tainted with shame, greed, pride, lust and idolatry. Suffering and death entered the world. Their sin, known as original sin, continues to be passed down to each of us.

In a manner of speaking, our bodies are like the mathematicians and computer scientists behind CAT scans endeavouring to make the invisible visible. Husbands and wives share in the co-creative power of God himself through the conception of their children, who are born in the image and likeness of God. Collaborating with God's creative hand and the gift of his grace received in the waters of Baptism, they slowly form their children's hearts and their own to visibly image God in their lives, who calls us to redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, his Son, on the Cross.

Responding to what has been heard

At the Easter Masses, we renew our Baptismal Promises as Jesus calls us to a conversion of heart (cf. Mark 1:15). Reflect this week on the following questions: **Do you renounce Satan? And all his works? And all his empty show?** Will you be able to state your 'yes' to this truth this Easter?

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make the words of the Apostles' Creed resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10 mins)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 139. Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

A: O LORD, you search me and you know me.
You yourself know my resting and my rising;

B: you discern my thoughts from afar.
You mark when I walk or lie down;
you know all my ways through and through.

A: For it was you who formed my inmost being,
knit me together in my mother's womb.

B: I thank you who wonderfully made me;

A: how wonderful are your works, which my soul knows well!

B: My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being fashioned in secret
and molded in the depths of the earth.

A: Your eyes saw me yet unformed;
and all days are recorded in your book,
formed before one of them came into being.

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here.

May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

From the Rite of Baptism: Called by Name

As a child of God, we are not just one amongst many. Jesus calls each of us by name yet he knows not only our name but also our deepest thoughts and desires. Parents often choose a Christian name for their child. In doing so, the family may seek the protection of a particular saint or it may be a reminder of their family's Christian heritage. When we name our children for the saints, we are reminding ourselves that God calls each child to a life of holiness and the eternity of heaven.

God gave Adam permission to name the beasts, the birds, the cattle. Adam named Eve, then their sons. When we name someone it is a sacred act, where we participate in God's plan for our salvation. We carry our names with us to heaven.

[Catechism references relating to this session 2156-2159]

About Lectio Divina & Visio Divina

Visio Divina is 'holy seeing', a spiritual practice adapted from the ancient monastic practice of lectio divina, or 'holy reading', which is a method of contemplating Sacred Scripture.'

Way of Beauty: Rekindling Eucharistic Amazement through Visio Divina, Jem Sullivan, p.13



Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

Describe what you can see, what is happening?

What does this picture say about our relationship with God's creation?

In Baptism, you enter into a relationship of love, becoming an adopted child of God. How do you respond?

How might you deepen your knowledge and love of God in the coming days?

Adam and Eve in the Earthly Paradise (1800) by Johann Wendzel Peter / Vatican Museums