

SEGMENT SIXTEEN

THEME: MARY AND THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Luke 1: 26 – 38 (Annunciation)

Luke 1: 46 – 55 (*Magnificat*)

INSTRUCTORS' SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

What the Catholic tradition believes about Mary and the saints is based on what is believed and taught about Jesus Christ and the Church. Jesus Christ as the Son of God is fully human and fully divine. And Mary, the Mother of the Son of God occupies a special and unique place in God's plan of salvation in Him.

From ancient times to the present day Catholics honor the unique role of Mary, the woman chosen to be the Mother of our Redeemer, with a special reverence and devotion. We do not adore or worship Mary, as adoration and worship is given only to God, to Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit. We venerate her singular example and prayerfully request her intercession for us.

Mary, who at the message of the archangel Gabriel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body gave birth to the Son of God in our world. She conceived, gave birth to and nourished Jesus, she presented him to God in the temple, and shared in her divine Son's sufferings on the cross. Through her "yes" to God and her faith in the Word of God she occupies a unique place in salvation history, in the Church and in the lives of believers. Therefore we consider Mary our Mother and the Mother of the Church in the order of grace and faith.

The Church also presents to us exemplary models of faith and discipleship throughout Christian history in the "Communion of Saints." The Church does not "make" or "worship" the saints, rather she recognizes the lives of saintly men and women through the ages as examples of faith, hope and love worthy of our imitation as we journey in faith.

- ❖ God chose the Virgin Mary to be the Mother of his Son, Jesus Christ. Throughout the Old Testament the role of Mary was prepared by other holy women (488 – 489) Throughout the liturgical year the Church celebrates feasts to honor the Blessed Mother of God. The Church fosters veneration and devotion to Mary, not worship or adoration.
- ❖ Mary is hailed by the archangel Gabriel as she who is “full of grace” It was only fitting that the Holy Spirit prepared Mary to be capable of welcoming in her heart and in her body the inexpressible gift of God in Jesus Christ (CCC 721 – 726).
- ❖ At the Annunciation the archangel Gabriel hails Mary as “full of grace.” The Virgin Mary “cooperated through free faith and obedience in human salvation.” Her “yes” to God was uttered in the name of all human nature so that by her obedience she becomes the New Eve, mother of the living. (CCC 511)
- ❖ Because of the unique and special role Mary plays in the plan of redemption, the Catholic tradition holds that she was enriched with gifts appropriate to such a role. From the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of Original Sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life. This doctrine is celebrated in the feast of the Immaculate Conception proclaimed on December 8, 1854 by Pope Pius IX (CCC 490 – 493)
- ❖ At her death Mary, preserved free from all stain of Original Sin, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory. This doctrine of Mary’s Assumption is an anticipation of the resurrection of all believers, and is celebrated on the Feast of the Assumption, proclaimed in 1950 by Pope Pius XII ((CCC 491, 966)
- ❖ Because of her unique role in bearing Jesus, the Son of God into this world, the Church also holds that Mary “remained a virgin in conceiving and giving birth to her Son.” Mary’s virginity manifests God’s absolute initiative and divine power in Mary who conceives Jesus Christ “by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (CCC 496 – 507)
- ❖ The “Hail Mary” is a prayer that echoes the unique role of Mary in the plan of our redemption. The “Rosary” is a meditative prayer that is a compendium or summary of the entire Gospel. By praying the Rosary we join with Mary in contemplating the mysteries of Christ’s life, death and resurrection. (CCC 971, 2673 – 2679)

- ❖ The “Communion of saints” is the Church, broadly speaking. Specifically the term “communion of saints” has two meanings: the community of all those who are baptized into Christ and who are now “pilgrims” on earth, the dead who are being purified to enter the presence of God, and the community of the saints - those holy men and women who are models of holiness, of faith, and love. (CCC 946 – 962)
- ❖ The Church does not “make” saints. Rather in canonizing a saintly man or woman, the Church publicly recognizes his or her exemplary cooperation with God’s grace and his or her life of virtue, holiness and love. The saints remind us of our heavenly goal and destiny in God. They are examples for all of us to follow on our faith journeys to God. All of us are called to holiness of life, to greater love and witness to Christ.
- ❖ In liturgical feasts and prayers, Catholics ask Mary, our Mother, and the saints to intercede to God on our behalf. The “Communion of saints” reflects our belief in the power of intercessory prayer. (CCC 2634 – 2636)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. Discuss the role and place of Mary, the Mother of God, in the Church and on our daily journeys of faith?
2. Name one or more saint(s) from the Christian tradition who serve as models of holiness and faith for you?
3. What are some ways the saints witness to Christian discipleship and values?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Luke 1: 26 – 28; 34-38

Matthew 1: 18-25

John 16: 14-15; 19: 26-27

1 Cor 1: 17

Hebrews 3:6

“The Virgin Mary, who at the message of the angel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world, is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the Redeemer. Redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son and united to him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of the Mother of the Son of God, the beloved daughter of the Father, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.”

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 53

“The various forms of piety towards the Mother of God, which the Church approves within the limits of sound and orthodox doctrine, according to the dispositions and understanding of the faithful, ensure that while the mother is honored, the Son...is rightly known, loved and glorified and his commandments observed.”

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 66

“To ask catechumens: “Do you wish to receive Baptism?” means at the same time to ask them: “Do you wish to become holy?” It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Pope John Paul II, *At The Beginning of the New Millennium, Novo Millenio Ineunte*, 31

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*, chapter VIII, Our Lady, articles 52-69

Pope John Paul II, Mother of the Redeemer, *Redemptoris Mater*, March 1987

_____, The Rosary of the Virgin Mary, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 2002

CLOSING PRAYER

Hail Mary