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# WE DARE TO ASK

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A resource for faith-sharing groups  
on our Baptismal Vocation

# WE DARE TO ASK

Nihil Obstat:

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Produced by the **Agency for Evangelisation and Catechesis (Archdiocese of Southwark)**

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Cover image: Pope Leo XIV sprinkling holy water with an aspergillum at his inauguration Mass (18 May 2025) / Photo credit: Vatican Media

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## About the Baptism Collaborative

The Baptism Collaborative is a group of catechists and religious, from across England and Wales, who share a common passion to see the Sacrament of Baptism recognised as a key moment in our lives. The Church describes Baptism as the most beautiful and precious gift of God, 'the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit; the door which gives access to the other sacraments' (CCC 1213). It is the starting point for a life of holiness and mission.

If you would like to join the discussions of the Baptism Collaborative, to share good practice and support each other, sign up via this link: <https://forms.office.com/e/4B67NjVD1B> or visit their webpage: <https://aec.rcaos.org.uk/baptism-collaborative>

## About this Booklet

*We Dare to Ask* is the third booklet in the *We Dare to* series (after: 2024 - *We Dare to Say* on the Lord's Prayer; 2025 - *We Dare to Hope* on the jubilee year theme of pilgrims of hope). This booklet seeks to encourage an appreciation of what is given in Christian Baptism. The title could have been otherwise, other options included: *We dare to*

- ... Seek - searching for the hidden life of God, into which we are called;
- ... Claim - seizing the dignity of being children of God by virtue of baptism;
- ... Confess - stating boldly the saving truths of salvation that we affirm at the Easter Vigil

Instead, we settled on *We Dare to Ask*. God desires what is best for each of us while respecting our freedom to choose. To express our acceptance of the wonderful gift that God's offers us, with open hearts and a willingness to change for the better, all we need to do is ask.

## Foreword to WE DARE TO ASK

From St John XXIII to Pope Leo, recent Popes have referred to their baptism as the most important day in their lives. They have sought to remind each of us to remember the day of our baptism, the start of our earthly pilgrimage to our heavenly Father. Through baptism, often described as a gateway or an entryway, we are not simply given membership of the Catholic Church but given the greatest of gifts, an ability to live in union with the awesome wonder of God, the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity.

We are called to respond to this gracious gift throughout our lives. The day of our baptism is just the beginning of a great adventure with God. Each year, at the most beautiful of liturgies, the Easter Vigil – and at other Easter Sunday Masses – we gather, as the people of God, to renew our Baptismal promises. To say with all our hearts, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe.’

This Lenten resource is a timely opportunity to look afresh at the grace of living out our baptism. For some, our baptism may simply be a long-ago event of little memory or relevance to our daily lives. Others may have more recent memories, perhaps fondly recalling the baptismal celebrations of their children or grandchildren. You may know others, or are yourself, preparing for your own baptism or that of your newborn infant. This resource is intended for all, wherever you are on your faith journey.

Designed for use by individuals or small groups, *We Dare to Ask* is comprised of five sessions which reflect on the Baptismal promises we make or renew at Easter. Accompanied by beautiful sacred art, the sessions include passages of Holy Scripture, prayer, and reflective meditations to explore how our baptism is not only rooted within God’s plan of salvation but is also a calling to a new way of life. Through using this resource, we invite you to a new way of living your baptism – not so much that we *were* baptised but that we *are* baptised; called to grow daily in our likeness of Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we journey to our heavenly Father.

Abbot Hugh Allan, O Praem

Director of Mission, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales

# About this Resource

## Artwork

A choice of art intended to illustrate the theme for meditation and contemplation

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The Baptism of Christ (1467-1470) by Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci

## Theme Box

A short paragraph outlining the broad theme of each session, useful for preparation

SESSION 4 / GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT 31

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within you; whom you have from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

**Theme:** As baptism we are anointed with the Holy Spirit who knows waits for us to call on him that he may help us to grow in holiness and our likeness of Christ.

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (15 mins)

O God,  
Send 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,  
truth and gentleness.

Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses  
from beginning to end.

May your love and light be with us  
as we 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 gone wrong, a cause for concern, something shared or the last time you did a good thing. This is a space for reflecting and a chance to share.

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)

## Opening Prayer

The same prayer is used in all five sessions and participants are invited to pray for one another and for the needs of the world

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Read and Reflect on the Scriptures Matthew 3:13-17, 4:1 (5 mins)

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness." And when this was completed, immediately he went up from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and, behold, a voice from heaven said, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." And now, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.

Meditate on the Word Matthew 3:13-17, 4:1 (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 highlight it with a highlighter. Then, in pairs, share the phrase with your group. Another person will then read the passage. While your group is listening, 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 moment in my life?

In what way has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

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

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

Published in the middle of the twentieth century, the Narnia series, in particular, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (1950) has become a classic work, enjoyed by millions of children and adults alike. The

## Read the Word

The Scripture passage around which the session is built. Here you will also find a brief introduction. A selection of prayers before reading the passage is on p.46

## Meditate on the Word

A series of questions to encourage prolonged meditation on the Word of God in the pages of the Bible

SESSION 4 / GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT 33

Author of this series and many other works for adults and children is one of Britain's literary giants, C.S. Lewis. His own conversion story, *Surprised by Joy* (1955), C.S. Lewis described how on reading the *Phantastes* (1868), the joy of George MacDonald, 'his imagination was baptised'. He was drawn to Christianity through the Narnia series, and the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Lewis and MacDonald, however, were not crafting an entirely new genre.

Written long before the coming of Christ, the Old Testament used the natural world to represent the divine. Perhaps most hidden in the Old Testament is the Holy Spirit, who was mysteriously and miraculously obvious all along.

On the 12th day after the baptism of Christ was 'heavenly fire' on the face of the waters. 'We see intimations of the Spirit of God in the dove sent by Noah and a cloud or column of fire which symbolised the Holy Spirit guiding the children of Israel through the desert. These are just a few examples of these anointings of oil to set apart individuals to serve as priests, prophets or kings.'

Holy Scripture recounts how the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus when he was baptised by Immovable in the River Jordan. From that moment, Jesus became Christ, the promised one before whom all the earth would bow, as it is written: 'The Holy Spirit was to accompany him on his mission to preach the Good News, to build the kingdom of God and to ultimately suffer and die that Yeshua and I may have the opportunity to be with him now and forever.'

Jesus himself knew that in the same way our ancestors had resisted the promises of Immovable, so too the first Christians would.

Jesus knew that the first Christians would continue to choose to go their own way in search of power, pleasure and gain. This is why he sent the Holy Spirit to be our guide, and 'our Helper' (John 14:16). He is the one who reminds us that the Holy Spirit knows it can be difficult for us to choose what is good and he wants to accompany us on our journey to him.

At our baptism, we are anointed with the oil of Chrism and anointed with the Spirit in the name of the three. When we take time to pray it is the Holy Spirit who guides and strengthens us to act in the silence of our hearts. The Holy Spirit is there when we ask, and when we seek him out.

By giving us the Holy Spirit, God our loving Father is giving us what he need to undertake our baptismal vocation to share in Christ's tri-fold mission:

## Explore and Reflect on the Theme

A reflection, containing references to the Church's teaching and to Scripture, designed to unfold the theme

**Additional Material**  
for reflection, from the Saints and Catechism, are signposted throughout in gold/blue text boxes

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as priests, we are called to share in the prayer and sacrifice of Jesus. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can recognise and increase our love for God and for others through willingly giving of ourselves for another. And join them to Christ's offering of himself to his heavenly Father at every Mass when the Priest says: 'Pray brothers and sisters, that my offering may be acceptable to the Almighty Father.'

as prophets, we are called to actively form our own church through our words and spiritual guidance so we may come to see like Jesus, to think like him and act like him - under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Just as the saints modelled Christ's message of love, mercy and freedom, we too can be the same in our homes and communities; and

as kings, we are called to master our bodies, govern our families and serve those in need. With



The reality of the Christian life is that not so much that we *were* baptised but that we *are* baptised.

## 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 question: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting? Will you be able to state your 'yes' to this truth this Easter?

By affirming these truths, we are renewing what we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are invited 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?

## Explore and Reflect on the Theme

Our reflection, continued with references to Church teaching and Scripture, unfolding the theme

## Timings

Timings for each of the different sections have been suggested. They are intended as a guide only.

## Responding to what has been heard

A short paragraph with an encouragement to reflect on the Baptismal Promises and an explicit connection between what has been heard in the Scripture, reflection and in daily living

## 36 WE DARE TO ASK

## From the Rite of Baptism: Chrism Oil

This perfumed Chrism oil, consecrated by the Bishop at the Chrism Mass each year, signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit to the newly baptised. By this anointing, the newly baptised receive an invisible, yet visible, mark of the Spirit. This mark is a sign of the love of God, of the image of Christ, a sign of union with him. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20).

We are anointed with Chrism for a second time at our Confirmation which completes our baptismal anointing and enables us to share more fully in the mission of Jesus Christ. Do speak to your Parish Priest if you have not yet been confirmed.

[Catechism references relating to this session 1817-1821]

## About Visio Divina

'To move the viewer from seeing... to contemplation, to adoration of God is the primary role of sacred and religious art. An artistic image of Christ, the Mother of God, a biblical scene or a Christian saint provides an earthly glimpse of the divine. It helps us to become, to a certain extent, divine. The adaptation of *lectio divina* for encounters with Christian art, provides one concrete way for the reader to make this journey from seeing to contemplation to adoration.'

The Beauty of Faith: Using Christian Art to Spread the Good News, Jen Sullivan, p.11

## Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord

To conclude the session we invite you to slowly pray the session's psalm together and end with the blessing

## Text Box

A brief reflection on a different aspect of the Baptismal Rite included for group or personal meditation with each session

## Visio Divina

An optional opportunity to reflect on the pictures used to illustrate each section of *We Dare To Ask*, with questions to support your reflection. This mode of prayer is becoming increasingly popular

## SESSION 4 / GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT 39

the help of the Holy Spirit, we can stand firm in the face of the temptations of this world.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, our own dying and rising to new life included at the Baptism, is our way of life. Our continual journey from self-centred pride to pride in Christ. The Holy Spirit quietly awaits and strengthens even our faint desire to live out our Baptismal vocations - to guide us as we participate in Christ's threefold mission. It is not so much that we *were* baptised but that we *are* baptised.

Go In Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (11 mins)

You are invited to close your eyes and listen to Psalm 15. Read it slowly, pause between verses to 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: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
- B: Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; to you, O Lord, do I call for mercy; be gracious to me, O Lord, and blot out my sins.
- A: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
- B: Keep me to the joy of your salvation, and sustain me with your salvation.
- 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 *Life of the Hours* is included here.

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

## SESSION 4 / GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT 37



Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

Describe what you can see, what is happening!

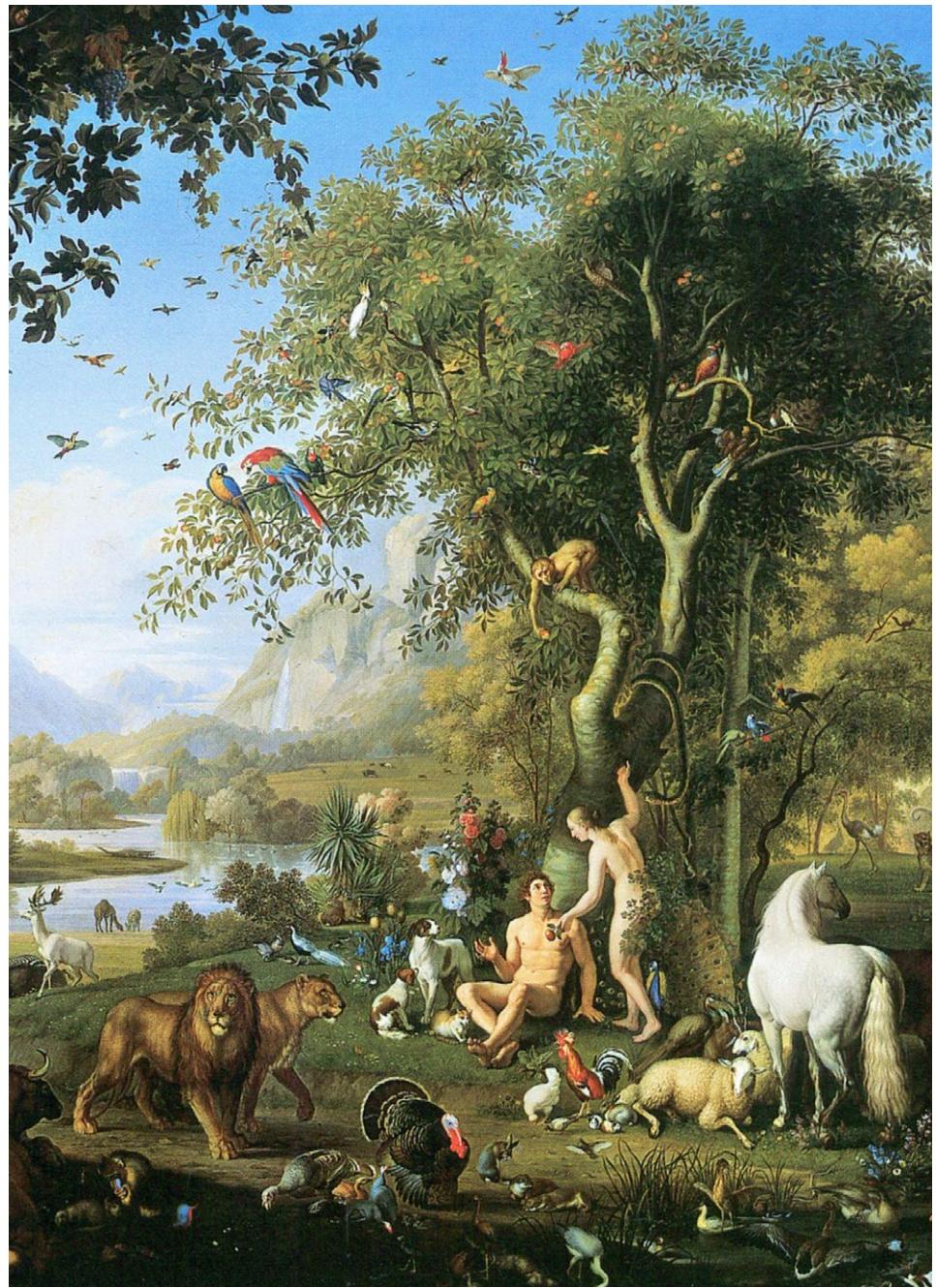
What does this picture say about the relationship within the Trinity?

In Baptism, you enter into this relationship of love. How do you respond?

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

The Baptism of Christ (1472-1475) by Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci | Uffizi

## 6 WE DARE TO ASK



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

## 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.



**Gifts of God's grace, received in the waters of Baptism, slowly form our hearts until they image his very own.**

### 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



Icon of the Holy Trinity (2025) by Jean-Marc Vingerhoets based on Rublev / Notre Dame de Paris

## SESSION 2 / LOVE REJECTED, THE MERCY OF THE FATHER

*And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you (Genesis 17:7).*

**Theme** God's covenant with Noah brought his people hope. By the time we hear of the disaster of the Tower of Babel, God's people have turned away from their Creator once again. God, however, continues to pursue the hearts of his beloved people. He called a man named Abram to gather his family and leave his homeland; to set himself apart from those worshipping pagan gods and he gives him a new name. Abraham found it difficult to surrender to God's will and he continually asked God for signs. God's response was to give Abraham a meaningful sign in the form of a covenant. God continues to pursue us today and makes a covenant with us at our Baptism.

### 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 12:1-3, 15:1-8 (5 mins)

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

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your very great reward.”

But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.” Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

He also said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.” But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

### **Meditate on the Word** Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-8 (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 has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped 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)

For many of us, homework assignments used to involve spending considerable time in a library leafing through the card catalogue and searching 'the stacks', the maze of shelving holding rows upon rows of books. Now, the Internet offers us a wealth of topical information in a matter of seconds. With research results readily at hand, especially in the new world of AI, analysing the information to uncover deeper meanings, studying the context and learning to probe further are all critical thinking skills that have become ever increasingly important. Rather than taking information at face value, students and others are challenging what they read and hear and are asking important big picture questions seeking out the truth about creation and about themselves.

Interestingly, the task of asking key questions has been a part of the Jewish Passover tradition since long before the time of Christ. Recognising the important role of the parents in forming their children in the faith set down in the Torah, family members would gather around the Seder table and the youngest would ask the four questions. The questions along with the symbolic foods enabled families not just to recall the Exodus story but to put themselves in the story. Together they imagined themselves alongside their ancestors being rescued by God; fleeing from slavery in Egypt so they could worship their loving Lord.

Questions were actually an integral part of the formation of the sacred promises known as covenants that God made with our ancestors. God asked Abraham to uproot his family and leave his pagan homeland without knowing

the destination (Gen 12). He promised him land and as many descendants. Yet, time and time again, Abraham questioned God 'how am I to know?' (Genesis 15) and as their relationship deepened, he implored God to save the righteous living in Sodom (Genesis 18). Confronted with challenges and overcome with doubt on occasion, Abraham had to learn to rely fully on God, to trust, to grow in faith. Aren't we still called today to do the same?

Just as parents hope to form in their children a curious, questioning mind to face the challenges of twenty-first century living, we are all offered the opportunity to look afresh at our faith, to explore our faith not just with the aid of new digital resources but together with others in our families and communities. God invites each of us to rekindle a child-like wonder, to turn to God with our questions, to seek out his guidance as we confront the challenges of our earthly journey to our heavenly Father. Most importantly, like the covenant first understood by Abraham, he offers each of us a never-ending relationship at our



We are called, each day, to make decisions of hope, even in the midst of suffering and anxiety, even in the apparent absence of God.



### 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 question: **Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth?** 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?

Baptism. 'I will be your God and you shall be my people'. He asks us to be a people of faith, trusting that he works for our good.

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

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 105. 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: Turn to the LORD and his strength;  
constantly seek his face.
- B: Remember the wonders he has done,  
his marvels and his words of judgment.
- A: O children of Abraham, his servant,  
O descendants of the Jacob he chose,
- B: he, the LORD, is our God;  
his judgments are in all the earth.
- A: He remembers his covenant forever:  
the promise he ordained for a thousand generations,
- B: the covenant he made with Abraham,  
the oath he swore to Isaac.
- A: He confirmed it for Jacob as a law,  
for Israel as a covenant forever,
- B: saying, "I will give you the land of Canaan  
to be your allotted inheritance."
- 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: Water

During the Easter Vigil, the highlight of the Church's liturgical year, the water to be used for baptism that evening is blessed. In this blessing, the Church recalls the great events of salvation history where God uses water to show us the outpouring of grace available to us at our baptism. We see this first at the creation of the world where the Spirit hovered over the waters (the waters can be seen as a symbol of life), we see it next when Noah and his family are saved through the waters of the flood (the waters of the sea can be seen as a symbol of death – the mystery of the cross). And how can we forget the liberation from slavery of the Israelites who cross the Red Sea, prefiguring our own baptism and are a symbol of our own liberation. And finally, the crossing of the River Jordan into the Promised Land where Abraham's descendants receive the land promised to them. Here the waters are a symbol of the promise of our own eternal life that Baptism brings.

**[Catechism references relating to this session 694, 1238-1240]**

### About Lectio Divina & Visio Divina

Lectio Divina [a way of seeing and hearing] ...can transform the way we see the world as the handiwork of God, the Divine Artist... and how we uphold the dignity of the human person, made in God's image, as the crown of creation.

The Beauty of Faith: Using Christian Art to Spread the Good News, Jem Sullivan, p.32



### Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

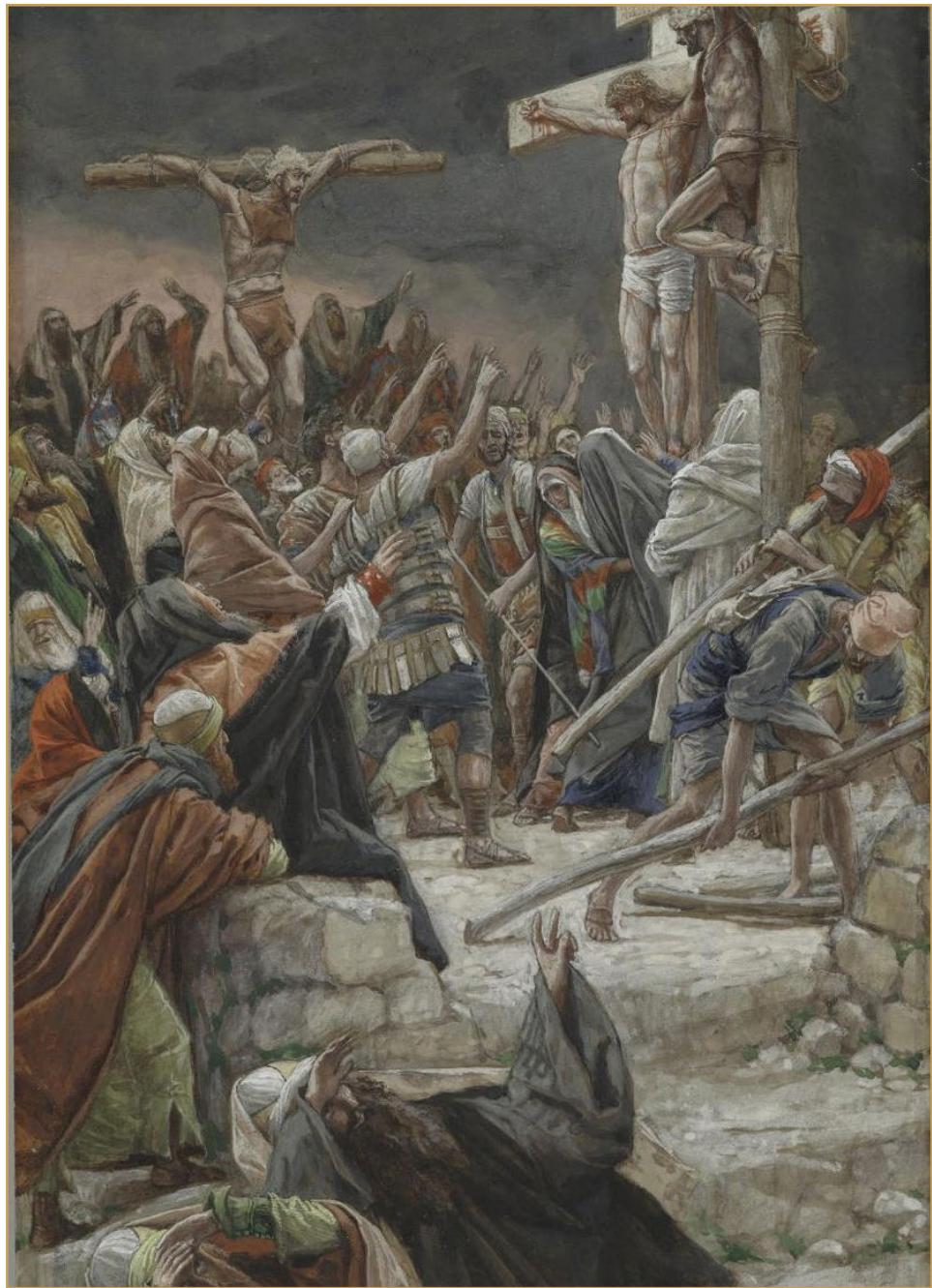
Describe what you can see, what is happening?

What does this picture say about the relationship within the Trinity?

In Baptism, you enter into this relationship of love. How do you respond?

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

Icon of the Holy Trinity (2025) by Jean-Marc Vingerhoets based on Andrei Rublev



The Pardon of the Good Thief (1886–1894) by James Tissot / Brooklyn Museum

## SESSION 3 / JESUS, THE BRIDGE OF MERCY

*But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).*

**Theme** In willing obedience to his Father's will, Christ lovingly took on human flesh to unjustly suffer for our sins. Scourged for our iniquities, he sacrificed his life to rescue us and offer us the opportunity to be with him now and forever.

### 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 and Reflect on the Scriptures** Romans 6:1-6 (5 mins)

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

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

### **Meditate on the Word** Romans 6:1-6 (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 has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped 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)

In recent years, business leaders have been fiercely debating whether they will continue to permit their employees to work from home. Precipitated by Covid, remote working contracts have enabled employees to work from pretty much anywhere, but some business executives are now calling their employees back to the office for at least some portion of each week. While enjoying lower travel costs and less time in transit, employees have grown accustomed to virtual meetings to facilitate discussions amongst work colleagues and line managers. Yet, business leaders contend in-person gatherings are not only better for business but also beneficial for employees. After, all, you can't turn your camera and sound off when meeting in person.

Similarly, in a fashion, God accompanied his people from afar while 'hiding his face' throughout the Old Testament (Deut 31:17). For generations, God quietly spoke to his people through the prophets. While they called God's people to turn back to him, to live in obedience to his mosaic covenant, the Ten Commandments, they often chose to go their own way, to worship pagan gods. Respecting their free choice and his own aversion to sin, God had to distance himself so they might suffer the pain of his absence even to the point of humiliation and death. Like Moses who died outside of the Promised Land because of idolatry amongst his people, the later prophets, notably Jeremiah and Ezekiel, physically suffered not only for their own sins but also for those of their people. Having been exiled from their homeland and their Temple destroyed, the Israelites realised they needed God's help to live according to the Commandments and began to hunger for his love, to recognise their sinful ways and ask forgiveness so that they might renew their covenantal relationship and grow closer to God, our loving Father.

It was not long thereafter that 'God sent forth his Son' (Gal 4:4). Christ broke into our world to take on human flesh, to do what we could not do on our own: to make an offering of his own life to rescue us from our sins. Through the Holy Family, he came to us in a body like ours and in doing so he gave a special dignity both to our bodies and to our families. In total openness to

the will of the Father, our Blessed Mother brought forth the gift of Christ's life, body and soul knitted together in human form to image the heart of our heavenly Father. Then, at the moment of his own baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Universe, who was sinless, lovingly assumed the sins of all and set about on his mission: to brutally suffer, die and rise to new life so that the pathway to eternal life would be restored for you and for me.

Having taken on our human flesh, the fruit of Christ's saving work is bestowed on each of us at our Baptism. Water was poured over our heads not as a simply symbolic gesture. It was poured over our heads to unite us to Christ and to transform us. Through the workings of the Holy Spirit, you and I became adopted children of God, our relationship with God, lost by our first parents Adam and Eve, was restored. Like the covenants made with our ancestors, Adam, Noah, Abraham



**The Lord of the Universe, became human, suffered and died, he rose to new life so that we too might live.**



### 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 question: **Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried, rose again from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father?** 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?

and David, Christ calls us to live in a covenant with him. He invites us each and every day to live our Baptism, to share in his saving work by continually dying to sin, turning away from own sinful, self-centred ways to rise again and again in newness of life in Christ. He gave his life for this. He dearly wants that likeness to grow in each of us so that we may be with him now and for eternity.

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

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 63. 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 God, you are my God; at dawn I seek you;  
for you my soul is thirsting.

B: For you my flesh is pining,  
like a dry, weary land without water.

A: I have come before you in the sanctuary,  
to behold your strength and your glory.

B: Your loving mercy is better than life;  
my lips will speak your praise.

A: I will bless you all my life;  
in your name I will lift up my hands.

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: White Garment

The white garment symbolises that the newly baptised has 'put on Christ' and has risen to new life in him. It is a sign of our vocation, our new identity as Christians. Through Baptism, we are transformed and elevated. We are made holy and called to grow in holiness.

With the help of God's graces, we are empowered to do what we cannot do on our own: to live in Christ, that is, to strive to be Christ-like each day, sharing in his virtues so that we may be with him for all eternity.

**[Catechism references relating to this session 1243-1244]**

### About Visio Divina

Genuine masterpieces of sacred and religious art offer privileged means by which we purify our vision and our heart so as to 'see God,' now and in the life to come.

The Beauty of Faith: Using Christian Art to Spread the Good News, Jem Sullivan, p.78



### Meditate on Sacred Art: *Visio Divina*

Describe what you can see, what is happening?

What does this picture say about the love poured out, by Jesus, for us?

In Baptism, you enter into this relationship of love. How do you respond?

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

The Pardon of the Good Thief / Le pardon du bon Larron (1886–1894) by James Tissot



The Baptism of Christ (1472–1475) by Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci

## SESSION 4 / GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within you, whom you have from God (1 Corinthians 6:19).*

**Theme** At our baptism we were anointed with the Holy Spirit who lovingly waits for us to call on him that he may help us to grow in holiness and our likeness of Christ.

### 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 and Reflect on the Scriptures Matthew 3:13-17, 4:1 (5 mins)

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

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptised by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.” Then he consented.

And when Jesus was baptised, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.

## Meditate on the Word Matthew 3:13-17, 4:1 (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 has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped 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)

Published in the middle of the twentieth century, the Narnia series, in particular, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) has become a classic work, enjoyed by millions of children and adults around the world. The

author of this series and many other works for adults and children is one of Britain's literary giants, C.S. Lewis. In his own conversion story, *Surprised by Joy* (1955), C.S. Lewis described how on reading the *Phantastes* (1858), the work of George MacDonald, 'his imagination was baptised'. He was drawn to use the natural world to write fantasy stories retelling biblical themes.

Lewis and MacDonald, however, were not crafting an entirely new genre. Written long before the coming of Christ, the Old Testament used the natural world to represent the divine. Perhaps most hidden in the Old Testament is the Holy Spirit. However, its importance is immediately obvious, in Genesis 1:2 we read 'And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.' We see intimations of the Holy Spirit in the dove sent out by Noah and in a cloud or column of fire which symbolised the Holy Spirit guiding the chosen people in the desert. Time and again, the Holy Spirit worked through anointings with oil to set apart individuals to serve as priests, prophets or kings.

Holy Scripture recounts how the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus when he was baptised by his cousin, John the Baptist, in the River Jordan. From that moment, Jesus became Christ, the anointed one bestowed with a particular vocation, a calling. The Holy Spirit was to accompany him on his mission to preach the Good News, to build the kingdom of God and to ultimately suffer and die that you and I may have the opportunity to be with him now and forever.

Jesus himself knew that in the same way our ancestors had rejected the message proclaimed by the prophets of the Old Testament, people would continue to choose to go their own way in search of power, pleasure and possessions. This is why he sent the Holy Spirit to be our guide, and 'our Helper' 'to bring to [our] remembrance all that [Jesus said]' (John 14:26). Jesus knows it can be difficult for us to choose what is good and he wants to accompany us on our life journey to him.

At our Baptism, we are anointed with the oil of Chrism and bestowed with the Holy Spirit in a bond of love. When we take time to pray it is the Holy Spirit who quietly and lovingly prompts us to action in the silence of our hearts. The Holy Spirit is there when we ask, and when we seek him out.

By gifting us the Holy Spirit, God our loving Father is giving us what we need to undertake our baptismal vocation: to share in Christ's threefold mission:

- **as priests**, we are called to share in the prayer and sacrifice of Jesus. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can recognise and increase our little daily sacrifices, those times when we lovingly give of ourselves for another, AND join them to Christ's offering of himself to his heavenly Father at every Mass when the Priest says: 'Pray brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father';
- **as prophets**, we are called to actively form ourselves through study of Holy Scripture and spiritual reading that we may come to see like Jesus, to think like him and act like him - under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Just as the saints modelled Christ's message of love, mercy and forgiveness, we are called to do the same in our homes and communities; and
- **as kings**, we are called to master our bodies, govern our families and serve those in need.



**The reality of the Christian life is that not so much that we *were* baptised but that we *are* baptised.**



### **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 question: **Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?** 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?

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can stand firm in the face of the temptations of this world.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, our own dying and rising to new life initiated at our Baptism becomes our way of life. Our continual turning from selfishness and pride to live in Christ is made visible. The Holy Spirit quietly awaits and strengthens even our littlest desire to live our Baptismal vocation - to guide us as we participate in Christ's threefold mission. It is not so much that we *were* baptised but that we *are* baptised.

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

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 69. 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: Save me from the waters of the deep,  
lest the waves overwhelm me.  
Let not the deep engulf me,  
nor the pit close its mouth on me.

B: LORD, answer, for your mercy is kind;  
in your great compassion, turn towards me.  
Do not hide your face from your servant;  
answer me quickly, for I am in distress.

A: The poor when they see it will be glad,  
and God-seeking hearts will revive;

B: for the LORD listens to the needy,  
and does not spurn his own in their chains.

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: Chrism Oil

This perfumed Chrism oil, consecrated by the Bishop at the Chrism Mass each year, signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit to the newly baptised. By this anointing, the newly baptised receive an invisible, yet indelible spiritual mark which one might describe as an 'engraving' of the image of Christ, a sign of union with him. 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God' (Galatians 2:20).

We are anointed with Chrism oil for a second time at our Confirmation which completes our baptismal anointing and enables us to share more fully in the mission of Jesus Christ. Do speak to your Parish Priest if you have not yet been confirmed.

**[Catechism references relating to this session 695, 1241-1242]**

### About Visio Divina

'To move the viewer from seeing, to contemplation, to adoration of God is the primary role of sacred and religious art. An artistic image of Christ, the Mother of God, a biblical event, or Christian saint provides an earthly glimpse into eternal realities, a 'head start to heaven,' so to speak. The adaptation of lectio divina for encounters with Christian art... provides one concrete way for the reader to make this journey from seeing to contemplation to adoration.'

The Beauty of Faith: Using Christian Art to Spread the Good News, Jem Sullivan, p.61



## Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

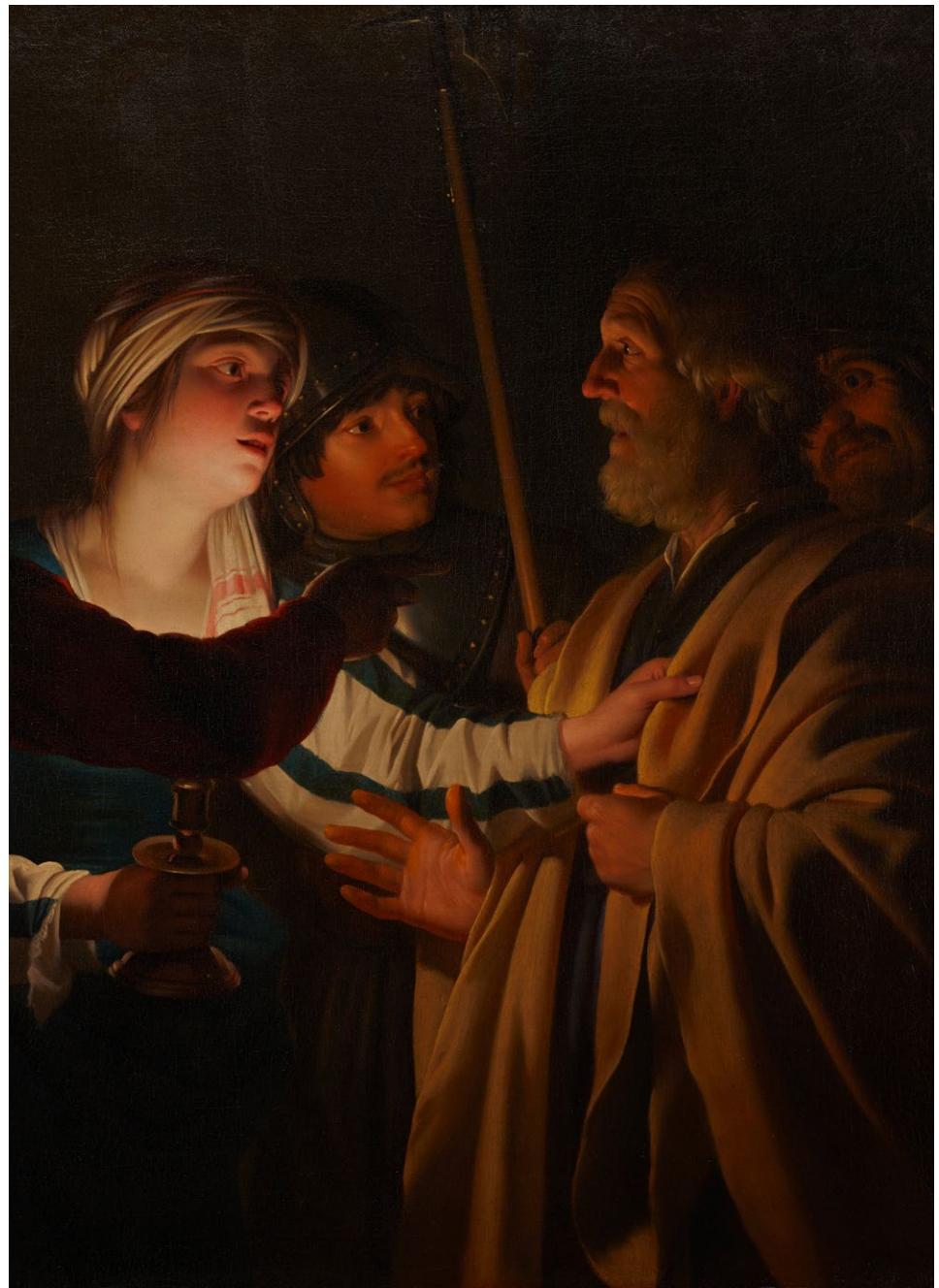
Describe what you can see, what is happening?

What does this picture say about the relationship within the Trinity?

In Baptism, you enter into this relationship of love. How do you respond?

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

The Baptism of Christ (1472–1475) by Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci / Uffizi



The Denial of St Peter (1622-24) by Gerard van Honthorst

## SESSION 5 / CHOOSING A LIFE IN CHRIST

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2).*

**Theme** Just as our gardens need our regular care, our interior life needs ongoing attention. Recollecting on our day each evening helps us to identify those times we were not Christ-like and prompt us to ask for his mercy and forgiveness. The Sacrament of Reconciliation offers us an opportunity to reset.

### 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 and Reflect on the Scriptures** Luke 22:54-62 (5 mins)

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

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

**Meditate on the Word** Luke 22:54-62 (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 has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped 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)

The Internet is awash with short videos depicting people who visit charity shops with the intention of finding furniture ripe for restoration. Time and again, someone's cast off: an old dresser, sideboard or family table with well worn, stained surfaces, dents and missing knob are brought home by those with a vision, a strategy to give it a new life. Cleaning, stripping and sanding are all part of the process to remove outdated trim and old finishing. In all of this, there is a lot of hard work and elbow grease with attention to the details – the joints, the corners and the legs. Sanding back to the wood provides the smooth surface for the new paint colour or updated detailing that will give the piece a new life - pride of place in someone's home for many years to come.

Unlike the inanimate old furniture that can't initiate either a deep cleaning or a transformation, we, however, only have to ask for a life in Christ. Parents ask, promising to raise their children in the Catholic faith, that their young children are baptised. This baptism is transformational because, cleansed of original sin, and given the gifts of faith, hope and love, the child experiences an initial conversion, and is given the graces needed for holiness and eternal life. Adults who are baptised and received into God's family similarly experience this joy of transformation, of conversion, this rising to new life in Christ. Bestowed with our special dignity as children of God, our journey, indeed our mission, begins.

Yet, the wound of Original Sin persists. The struggle of conversion persists. Somewhat like the furniture that over time loses its lustre and becomes scratched and dented, we are tempted to follow the path of our ancestors who frequently ignored the Old Testament prophets. Surrounded by tribes and nations who worshipped pagan gods, they chose to follow the crowd, to worship gods other than the one true God. We too are full of frailty and weakness. Creating our own 21<sup>st</sup> Century idols, we persist in putting our own desires for power, pleasure or possessions ahead of God.

Jesus came with a message not just for St Peter and other Jews living in the first century but for you and me when he proclaimed, 'The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel' (Mark 1:15). Moreover, Jesus knew that we would struggle and, as he always does, he

gave us what we need. From the moment of our Baptism, the Holy Spirit quietly guides us. In the silence of our hearts, we are prompted to examine our consciences to identify those times we were not Christ-like and to seek out the Sacraments, to ask for the grace of Christ's mercy and healing in the Sacrament of Reconciliation so that we may beneficially receive the graces bestowed in the Eucharist. Choosing to turn back to our loving Lord and asking, indeed begging, him to restore the light of Christ in our souls is what the Catechism terms our 'second conversion'. (CCC 1428)

St Ambrose says of the two conversions, that in the Church, 'there are water and tears; the waters of Baptism and tears of repentance' (CCC 1429).

The Catechism further explains that 'this second conversion is the uninterrupted task for the whole Church', each one of us is called to follow the path of penance and renewal. Therefore, it is fitting that our Lenten observance not only includes the Sacrament of Reconciliation but also concludes by gathering at ►



**From the moment of our Baptism, the Holy Spirit quietly guides us.**

### 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). As we near Easter look back on the Baptism promises you have reflected on each week during this course. If you need to, pray for the faith to be able to state your 'yes' to this truth this Easter. Pray too for those who have accompanied you these weeks.

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?

the Easter Vigil to communally recommit to our Baptismal promises, to strive to live each day as a part of God's family, the Blessed Trinity, when we chose to live a life in Christ.

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

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 51. 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: Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your merciful love;  
according to your great compassion,  
blot out my transgressions.

B: Wash me completely from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.  
My transgressions, truly I know them;  
my sin is always before me.

A: Yes, you delight in sincerity of heart;  
in secret you teach me wisdom.  
Let me hear rejoicing and gladness,  
that the bones you have crushed may exult.

B: Turn away your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my guilt.  
Create a pure heart for me, O God;  
renew a steadfast spirit within me.

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: Candle

At our baptism a small candle is lit from the large Paschal candle, which was first lit at the Easter Vigil. It is a sign that Christ has risen and has brought light to our world darkened by sin.

The newly baptised are given a small candle as their baptismal candle, to go forth in faith, guided by Jesus. It is a reminder to imitate him daily, to progress along the way to holiness, to make visible Christ's presence on earth.

**[Catechism references relating to this session 696, 1243]**

### From the Exsultet (the story of our salvation, sung at the Easter Vigil)

This is the night of which it is written: the night shall be as bright as day, dazzling is the night for me, and full of gladness. The sanctifying power of this night dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners, drives out hatred, fosters concord, and brings down the mighty. On this, your night of grace, O holy Father, accept this candle, a solemn offering, the work of bees and of your servants' hands, an evening sacrifice of praise, this gift from your most holy Church.

### About Visio Divina

'Our capacity for beauty leads us on a path of inner renewal as we move from the visible to the invisible mystery of God. The experience of beauty awakens our spiritual senses and prepares us for a new way of seeing the world – as "charged with the grandeur of God", in the words of the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins.'

Way of Beauty: Rekindling Eucharistic Amazement through Visio Divina, Jem Sullivan, p.11



### Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

Describe what you can see, what is happening?

What does this picture say about the challenges experienced by disciples in maintaining a relationship of love?

In Baptism, you enter into this relationship of love. How do you respond?

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

The Denial of St Peter (1622-24) by Gerard van Honthorst / Minneapolis Institute of Art

## Introductory phrases before reading Scripture

Let us listen carefully to the Word of the Lord, and attend to it with the ear of our hearts. Let us welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice. *St Benedict of Nursia (c.480-c.547) adapted*

Merciful God, anoint me with your Holy Spirit. As I read your Word, let me hear your voice speaking to me from within. Give me the wisdom to understand your message to me. Give me strength to build my life on your Word. May I rejoice in hearing your Word and keeping it. *Fr Augustine Vallooran V.C.*

Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort me and restore me. *att. St Patrick (c.387-c.460)*

Let us pray with great confidence, with confidence based upon the goodness and infinite generosity of God and upon the promises of Jesus Christ. God is a spring of living water which flows unceasingly into the hearts of those who pray. *St Louis de Montfort (1673-1716)*

Lord, inspire me to read your Scriptures and to meditate upon them day and night. I beg you to give me real understanding of what I need, that I in turn may put its precepts into practice. Yet, I know that understanding and good intentions are worthless, unless rooted in your graceful love. So I ask that the words of Scripture may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into my heart. *Origen (184-253)*

O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart, that I may hear Thy word and understand and do Thy will. On Thee do I set my hope, that Thou shalt enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of Thy knowledge, not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them; that in reading the lives and sayings of the saints I may not sin, but that such may serve for my restoration, enlightenment and sanctification, for the salvation of my soul, and the inheritance of life everlasting. *St John Chrysostom (347-407)*

Let us speak of the God whom we love, listen to the God who wishes to speak to us. 'Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening'. *EG, 146 and 1 Samuel 3:9*

Let us go forward in peace, our eyes upon heaven, the only one goal of our labours. *St Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897)*

## The Renewal of Baptismal Promises

At the Easter Vigil, when the Rite of Baptism (and Confirmation) has been completed or, if this has not taken place, after the blessing of water, all stand, holding lighted candles in their hands, and renew the promises of baptismal faith.

Dear brothers and sisters,  
through the Paschal Mystery  
we have been buried with Christ in Baptism,  
so that we may walk with him in newness of life.  
And so, now that our Lenten observance is concluded,  
let us renew the promises of Holy Baptism,  
by which we once renounced Satan and his works  
and promised to service God in the holy Catholic Church.

And so I ask you:

**Priest:** Do you reject Satan?                   **All:** I do.

**Priest:** And all his works?                   **All:** I do.

**Priest:** And all his empty show?                   **All:** I do.

**Priest:** Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth?

**All:** I do.

**Priest:** Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried, rose again from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father?

**All:** I do.

**Priest:** Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

**All:** I do.

**Priest:** And may almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given us new birth by water and the Holy Spirit and bestowed on us forgiveness of our sins, keep us by his grace, in Christ Jesus our Lord, for eternal life.

**All:** Amen.

## Apostles' Creed

I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended into hell;  
on the third day he rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;  
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting.  
Amen.

## The Song of Zechariah (Benedictus)

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel!  
He has visited his people and redeemed them.

He has raised up for us a mighty saviour in the house of David his servant, as he promised by the lips of holy men, those who were his prophets from of old.

A saviour who would free us from our foes, from the hands of all who hate us.  
So his love for our fathers is fulfilled and his holy covenant remembered.

He swore to Abraham our father to grant us, that free from fear, and saved from the hands of our foes, we might serve him in holiness and justice all the days of our life in his presence.

As for you, little child, you shall be called a prophet of God, the Most High.

You shall go ahead of the Lord to prepare his ways before him.

To make known to his people their salvation through forgiveness of all their sins, the loving-kindness of the heart of our God who visits us like the dawn from on high.

He will give light to those in darkness, those who dwell in the shadow of death, and guide us into the way of peace.

## The Song of Mary (Magnificat)

My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. He looks on his servant in her lowliness; henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

The Almighty works marvels for me. Holy his name!  
His mercy is from age to age, on those who fear him.

He puts forth his arm in strength and scatters the proud hearted. He casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly.

He fills the starving with good things, sends the rich away empty.

He protects Israel, his servant, remembering his mercy, the mercy promised to our fathers, to Abraham and his sons for ever.

The Benedictus can be found in the first chapter of Luke's gospel (Luke 1:68-79). It is sung daily at Morning Prayer. You can also find the Magnificat in Luke's account, earlier in chapter one (Luke 1:46-55). It is sung daily at Evening Prayer.



Baptism makes us full members of God's great family... the initiative always comes from him and we respond to it by experiencing his love that saves us.

Pope Leo XIV

WE DARE  
TO ASK



BAPTISM  
COLLABORATIVE