LESSON 3: CST THE LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

RESOURCES: CATECHISM AND BIBLE

THE KEY QUESTIONS

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CREATED IN GOD’S IMAGE?

THE DIGNITY OF MAN

The society that we live in today typically can’t agree on much, and perhaps by our seemingly constant infighting, one could say that the only thing we do agree on is the truth of our existence. We read in Genesis how we got here, but is that all we find there? Evolution aside, we were and are created, that much is clear in Sacred Scripture. Why we’re created, however, is sometimes a bit more of a mystery. The Church teaches that our inherent dignity, in itself our purpose, is not only from God, but a perfect recreation of His own image & likeness. Regardless of whether or not we notice His power and grace, He continues to bestow it upon us... all of us.

FROM THE HOLY FATHERS:

In Christ and through Christ man has acquired full awareness of his dignity, of the heights to which he is raised, of the surpassing worth of his own humanity, and of the meaning of his existence. POPE JOHN PAUL II

God is not solitude, but perfect communion. For this reason the human person, the image of God, realizes himself or herself in love, which is a sincere gift of self. POPE BENEDICT XVI

I cannot fail to note once again that the poor constitute the modern challenge, especially for the well-off of our planet, where millions of people live in inhuman conditions and many are literally dying of hunger. It is not possible to announce God the Father to these brothers and sisters without taking on the responsibility of building a more just society in the name of Christ. POPE JOHN PAUL II

We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. POPE BENEDICT XVI
Quite simply put, we are the spiritual “face” of God, in that we are given - by our very conception - purpose, love, and a place in His divine plan. The Catechism continues:

**CCC 1703-1705 Endowed with "a spiritual and immortal" soul, the human person is "the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake." From his conception, he is destined for eternal beatitude. The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator. By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection "in seeking and loving what is true and good." By virtue of his soul and his spiritual powers of intellect and will, man is endowed with freedom, an "outstanding manifestation of the divine image."**

**WITH SUCH DIGNITY WE HAVE GREAT RESPONSIBILITY**

With the gifts of freedom, our will, and for the very sake of our being, we are then called to live up to a great responsibility. We’re given a tough task in seeing the dignity in every human being, but the Gospel compels us to live a life in the footsteps of Christ. Christ’s passion and death on the Cross is the ultimate example of service to our brother and the re-birth of the perfect human image.

**CCC 1701 It is in Christ, "the image of the invisible God," that man has been created "in the image and likeness" of the Creator. It is in Christ, Redeemer and Savior, that the divine image, disfigured in man by the first sin, has been restored to its original beauty and ennobled by the grace of God.**

The graces of our creation and the gift of the cross call us to lead a life of reverence and respect for our friends, and our enemies. We are called to embrace everyone as Christ would embrace them. We are called to love one another as the Father has loved us by having created us. More simply, because the Father values every soul, so are we inclined to value everyone we meet... Even the folks we can’t stand sometimes.

Around the world, different societies have different ways of showing respect for one another interpersonally and among social groups. These ways of communicating are sometimes extravagant and sometimes very simple, but they point, on a deeper level, to the dignity inherent in us through our creation. When someone that we work or go to school with walks by and acknowledges us, in a way they’re saying that they regard our presence, and therefore affirm our existence as created
We respect the dignity of our fellow man because he also is made in God’s image.

The Church teaches social justice at the core of its ministerial and evangelical practices. We employ that in order to truly be an instrument of God’s wisdom and knowledge, you must first be an instrument of His kindness and charity. To practice God’s true justice in our daily lives we must regard all people with the same esteem and thoughtfulness that we would expect from them.

**CCC 1929** Social justice can be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of man. The person represents the ultimate end of society, which is ordered to him: What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt.

Any society - being the product of a group of people who share a particular group of morals or specific traits - must respect first that the individual is a product of creation. Societies must take the rights of individual people into account before they can be implement laws or even basic social norms.

**CCC 1930** Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy.

Perhaps Christ’s most fundamental teaching, the love for a neighbor as self (Mk. 12:31), sums up both the beatitudes as the divine path, and Christ’s personal invitation to service as respect and love for Him. When we read of Christ assuming equality with us through the incarnation, and by His own words in calling us His brothers and sisters (Mt. 25:40), the weight of human dignity in every person cannot be denied.

**CCC 1931-1932** Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that “everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as ‘another self,’ above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity.” No legislation could by itself do away with the fears, prejudices, and attitudes of pride and selfishness which obstruct the establishment of truly fraternal societies. Such behavior will cease only through the charity that finds in every man a “neighbor,” a
brother. The duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.

Despite our differences, we cannot deny the commonalities of our creation. Our common basic existence implores that we embrace our temporal differences. Those differences become the face of our humanity when we share them with one another. If we are truly being Christ to one another, that sharing pours forth as love.

**CCC 1933** This same duty extends to those who think or act differently from us. The teaching of Christ goes so far as to require the forgiveness of offenses. He extends the commandment of love, which is that of the New Law, to all enemies. Liberation in the spirit of the Gospel is incompatible with hatred of one's enemy as a person, but not with hatred of the evil that he does as an enemy.

Additional scriptures identifying human dignity: Genesis 3:18-24, Sirach 15:14-20, Matthew 25:34-40, Romans 8:16-21, 2 Corinthians 4:6-12, Colossians 1:9-14, 2 Peter 1: 4-11
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: USE AS MANY OR AS FEW AS YOU WANT. BE PREPARED, BUT LET THE HOLY SPIRIT LEAD THE DISCUSSION.

1. What is dignity?
2. How does the Church know that all people have the same dignity?
3. Can you think of people who are not treated with the respect they deserve? Can you name some reasons that they’re treated differently than everyone else?
   a. Please ensure that you as a catechist address the issue.
4. Are you always treated with the dignity and respect that you deserve? Yes or no, how does that make you feel?
5. Are there people in your school who are not treated with equal dignity?
6. If so, what can you do to ensure that they are treated with equality?

TAKE HOME MESSAGE:

We are made in the image and likeness of God!
1711 Endowed with a spiritual soul, with intellect and with free will, the human person is from his very conception ordered to God and destined for eternal beatitude. He pursues his perfection in "seeking and loving what is true and good" (GS 15 § 2).

1712 In man, true freedom is an "outstanding manifestation of the divine image" (GS 17).

1713 Man is obliged to follow the moral law, which urges him "to do what is good and avoid what is evil" (cf. GS 16). This law makes itself heard in his conscience.

1714 Man, having been wounded in his nature by original sin, is subject to error and inclined to evil in exercising his freedom.

1715 He who believes in Christ has new life in the Holy Spirit. The moral life, increased and brought to maturity in grace, is to reach its fulfillment in the glory of heaven.

1943 Society ensures social justice by providing the conditions that allow associations and individuals to obtain their due.

1944 Respect for the human person considers the other "another self." It presupposes respect for the fundamental rights that flow from the dignity intrinsic of the person.

1945 The equality of men concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it.

1946 The differences among persons belong to God's plan, who wills that we should need one another. These differences should encourage charity.

1947 The equal dignity of human persons requires the effort to reduce excessive social and economic inequalities. It gives urgency to the elimination of sinful inequalities.

1948 Solidarity is an eminently Christian virtue. It practices the sharing of spiritual goods even more than material ones.

FROM GAUDIUM ET SPES (VATICAN II)
PASTORAL CONSTITUTIONON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD

22. The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come,(20) namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown.

He Who is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15),(21) is Himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam He restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward. Since human nature as He assumed it was not annulled, by that very
fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too. **For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart.** Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.

As an innocent lamb He merited for us life by the free shedding of His own blood. In Him God reconciled us to Himself and among ourselves; from bondage to the devil and sin He delivered us, so that each one of us can say with the Apostle: The Son of God "loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). By suffering for us He not only provided us with an example for our imitation, He blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning.

The Christian man, conformed to the likeness of that Son Who is the firstborn of many brothers, received "the first-fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23) by which he becomes capable of discharging the new law of love. Through this Spirit, who is "the pledge of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14), the whole man is renewed from within, even to the achievement of "the redemption of the body" (Rom. 8:23): "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the death dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11). Pressing upon the Christian to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope.....

24. God, Who has fatherly concern for everyone, **has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood.** For having been created in the image of God, Who "from one man has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26), **all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God Himself.**

For this reason, love for God and neighbor is the first and greatest commandment. Sacred Scripture, however, teaches us that the love of God **cannot be separated from love of neighbor:** "If there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.... Love therefore is the fulfillment of the Law" (Rom. 13:9-10; cf. 1 John 4:20). To men growing daily more dependent on one another, and to a world becoming more unified every day, this truth proves to be of paramount importance.

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, "that all may be one. . . as we are one" (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. **This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself**