

C.L.O.V.E.R.

- **CONFESSIO** • **LIFE** • **OUR LADY** • **VOCATIONS** •
- **EUCHARIST** • **REVEALED WORD** •

INTRODUCTION: WHY CLOVER?

MADE FOR MORE

Since the first moment of our existence, the human heart has ached for something infinite. We each experience this ache daily as we encounter our unquenchable desire for *more*. We finish eating something delicious; we crave *more*. We finish spending time with someone we love; we long for *more*. When we come to the end of a good book, a good movie, a beautiful sunset, the high of a healthy adrenaline rush, the experience of success, the thrill of adventure - we always want *more*.

As Catholics, we believe this longing points us toward our ultimate purpose. C.S. Lewis summed it up by saying, “If we find ourselves with a desire nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.” St. Augustine was even more to-the-point: “Our hearts are restless, O God, until they rest in you.” Every human heart longs to know the answer to the question “why do I exist?” The Catholic Church unceasingly proclaims: You exist to know, love, and serve the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—God who is perfect and infinite love.

DISCIPLESHIP

Our Catholic faith shows us who God is and how we are to live in right relationship with him! It is the full revelation of Jesus Christ; and it is a call to become Jesus’ *disciples*, a term rich in meaning. A disciple is a “*learner*,” “*pupil*,” “*student*,” or “*follower*.” A disciple is truly someone who wants to imitate and become like their master or teacher. As Catholics, we are disciples of Jesus Christ for the purpose of becoming transformed by Christ into Christ. This transformation calls us to a missionary spirit to go make other disciples of family, friends, and anyone whom God puts in our life.

Thus, living and knowing our Catholic faith is the path to true discipleship. Yet, *where do you begin?* Our faith is so big and encompasses so much! *What should you focus on?* This is where CLOVER comes in. CLOVER is an acronym for six essential principles to Catholic living and discipleship for a healthy relationship

with Jesus and his Church. By living these six principles, you will learn what it means to be Jesus' disciple.

C.L.O.V.E.R.

C.L.O.V.E.R. stands for: **C**onfession, **L**ife, **O**ur Lady, **V**ocations, **E**ucharist & **R**evealed Word. Each letter is interconnected with the others. They help to develop your spiritual self and build up the Church community. They are ideals for Catholic living but have practical application by which you can set real goals. They focus on the essentials of Catholic living and, thus, they help you set priorities for living your faith.

This booklet is meant to explain what each of the CLOVER principles is and why they are important. After you gain that foundational understanding, it will be time for you to start to find ways to live them out. St. Malachy parish offers many opportunities for living each of the CLOVER principles. Each of them gives you a chance to *grow closer* to Jesus with us.

We hope and pray you do *GROW CLOSER* through CLOVER!

C – CONFESSION

Scripture Reflection

John 20:19-23 & 21:15-19

RELATIONSHIP

We were made for relationship! The most important relationship in anyone's life is a relationship with God who happens to be a relationship within Himself—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—God is a community of persons. This relational God created us to have a relationship with Him. Yet, sin breaks that relationship both with God and with one another.

While all sin hurts our relationship with God and neighbor, there are different degrees of sin noted in the Bible. John writes in his first letter:

If anyone sees his brother sinning, if the sin is not deadly, he should pray to God and he will give him life. This is only for those whose sin is not deadly. There is such a thing as deadly sin, about which I do not say that you should pray (1 Jn 5:16).

John is telling us that there are certain sins we should pray to God for forgiveness, but there are also other sins—*deadly* ones—which we are told we cannot pray away. He writes in such a way as to assume his readers know what they need to do about this *deadly* sin since he does not explain it.

This is evidence of two things. First, there are different degrees of sin which the Church calls *venial sin* and *moral sin*. But, second, it means Christians were practicing the Sacrament of Confession from the time the Bible was written.

MORAL AND VENIAL SIN

Venial sins are smaller sins which do not cut us off from God's divine life. They are sins that fail to observe necessary moderation (like over-eating), or in lesser matters of the moral law (like telling white lies), or in grave matters of the moral law but done without full knowledge or complete consent (like missing Mass on a

holy day of obligation when we didn't realize it was a holy day and we needed to go to Mass).

Mortal sins are grave infractions against the law of God that breaks off our access to God's divine life in us. This is why John calls them "deadly." Knowing the different degrees of sin is a key component to forming our consciences which helps us to know both the difference between right and wrong but also when we really need to get to the Sacrament of Confession.

Yet, we should also be aware that even after our sins are forgiven through Confession that the effects of sin remain in the world which demands our reparation or repayment. This is called *temporal punishment*. The "effects of sin" might include the damaged self-esteem of someone whom we hurt by publically making fun of them, someone's lost property through our vandalism or stealing, or a destroyed reputation through gossip or detraction. God forgives us in the sacrament, but He also created us with such a dignity that we have a responsibility to make reparation for the damage we caused in the world which every sin has.

Jesus Christ has paid the full price for our sins and all their effects on the world, but our participation is still requested by God. This can be done by many ways like the corporal works of mercy and other acts of charity, prayer, and other penitential practices like fasting or almsgiving.

CONVERSION

Jesus made it clear that his disciples were meant to participate in his work of reparation and redemption of the human family. Jesus' first words in the Gospel are: "Repent; and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15). To repent is "to feel such regret for sins as to produce an amendment of life." This "amendment of life" is what we call *conversion*. Conversion means "turning, change, transformation." It very often involves a confession of past sins and acts of reparation from the heart for the damage we've caused by our sins. To be a disciple of Jesus, one must be on the path of constant conversion which is a lifelong process of rooting out sinful vices and growing in Godly virtues.

Sacramental Confession is part of the Catholic path to conversion. It is an ongoing step to the continual process of conversion in our lives. In conversion there

should be both interior dispositions of heart (our feelings) but also exterior sign of that interior disposition of heart (our actions like going to confession and making reparation). The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains:

The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others (CCC 1434).

SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATIONS

God created human beings with both body and soul which means our healing transformation happens in both body (externally) and soul (internally). Our relationships with God and neighbor need our full participation for true healing transformation. This process of healing through interior and exterior was present throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, the Jews practiced confessing their sins to their Levitical priests and offering burnt animal sacrifices.

When someone is guilty in regard to any of these matters, that person shall confess the wrong committed, and make reparation to the Lord for the wrong committed (Lev 5:5-6).

When John the Baptist announced the coming of the Christ, he was baptizing people as they “acknowledged (or confessed) their sins” (Mt 3:6). We can assume there was a vocal component present. John the Baptist was from a Jewish priestly family. He held this role in the community and served as the transition from Levitical confession to the Sacramental confession.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, he was forgiving sins because he had the authority to do so since He is God and only God can forgive sins. Forgiving sins, in fact, was the most important part of Jesus’ mission. Therefore, Jesus wanted this ministry to continue even after he ascended into heaven until his coming in glory.

APOSTOLIC INVOLVEMENT

So, Jesus delegated his authority to forgive sins to his Apostles—the first bishops. Jesus gave them the power and authority to forgive sins in his Name.

[Jesus] said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained' (Jn 20:21-23).

The Apostles continued Jesus' ministry of forgiveness and delegated others in Jesus' Name to continue it after them. We call this *apostolic succession* since Jesus intended this ministry of forgiveness to continue until he comes at the end of the world. The Apostles and their successors—bishops—also ordain helpers—priests—to aid them in their sacramental ministry.

MERCIFUL LOVE

By the sacrament of Confession, we continue to live out Jesus' ministry of forgiveness and reparation through our own unique participation in God's love and mercy. It is a personal encounter between priest and penitent which God foresaw as a necessary means for our healing and restoration. We need healing and forgiveness in ourselves, with our community, and with God whenever we sin. Confession is the vehicle Christ gave us to experience his forgiving presence.

We should not be fearful or afraid of God's merciful love. It is rather the cause of our joy. Our brokenness from sin deceives us that we will be hurt more or be shamed in confession, but this is a lie! We will only meet God's love and mercy if we come with humility and trust. God works through the priest to bring the healing we so desire and need.

Confession is the true remedy our society needs today more than ever. Jesus is there to encounter you and restore you to a right relationship—with yourself, with the world, and with God. Come and see.

L – LIFE

Scripture Reflection

Genesis 2:4-25

IMAGE AND LIKENESS

From the Creation Story of Genesis 1, we read: “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Gen 1:27).

Human beings are the jewel in the crown of God’s creation. We are so special to God because we are created in God’s own image and likeness. Nothing else in creation reflects God so closely as humans—not the earth or sky, the birds or fish, plants or animals. And because of this, God wants to have a loving relationship with us.

In order to understand that, we must understand what it means to be created in God’s own divine image. First, we know that God is trinity. God is a community of persons. He is one divine being in three divine persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God as a trinity of persons reveals that we too were made for community and loving relationships—first with God and next with one another.

COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

And we were not just made for any kind of relationships but *covenant* relationships. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, covenants are sacred agreements between God and humans involving mutual commitments and guarantees. They involve an exchange of persons—giving oneself over to the other.

Covenants are the highest form of loving relationships. Love is to will or desire the good of someone else. In the Trinity, for all eternity, the Father loves the Son who, in turn, receives that love and returns it to the Father. And the love shared eternally between Father and Son is powerful enough to be another person—the Holy Spirit.

In Genesis 2, when God sees man is alone, he says this is not good! So, God forms woman out of the man's rib since the rib is the closest part of the man to his heart. This reveals just how much God wants man and woman to love one another in covenant relationships. These covenants between one man and one woman are call *marriage*.

When [God] brought [the woman] to the man, the man said: “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called ‘woman,’ for out of man this one has been taken.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body. The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame (Gen 2:22-25)

While marriage was created as the first covenant, not all covenants are marriages. God will create many covenants with people throughout history—with Noah's family, with Abraham's tribe, with Moses' nation, with David's kingdom, and with the whole world in Jesus Christ.

LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY

One thing is for sure, all covenants begin with a responsibility to “[love] the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Dt 6:5). Once we have put God first in our lives all our other relationships find their proper place—with our spouse, with our family, with our community, with our nation, and with the entire world.

We have this responsibility to love God first because “He first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). God loved us so much that He sent his Son to die for us (see Jn 3:16). In fact, God gives us everything we have, our whole life, because He loves us. The greatest gift that God shares with us is his divine life, and he wants us to share that life with others.

In order to love God and live our covenant with God, we must keep his commandments since covenants involve demands and commitments. When we keep God's commandments, we live in a right relationship with both God and one another.

The first commandment God gave human beings in the Bible was to “be fertile and multiple; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28). This commandment is twofold. First, it asks us to procreate, that is, to have children. Procreation is a participation in God’s creativity. It continues the creation of God’s dearest creatures—human beings. Second, it asks us to rule the world. This does not mean in an abusive sort of way, but rather, as caretakers of creation and developers of it. We might compare it as a gardener to his garden. The gardening is not to the detriment of the gardener but for both the gardener’s life and goodness and also the garden’s own growth and beauty.

This commandment to be fertile and multiple and to build up creation is characteristic of love. Since love wants someone else’s best, love is always selfless and self-giving. The lover thinks not of himself but of his beloved. Thus, love is generative. It seeks to give rather than receive. The opposite of love is selfishness, self-centeredness, and self-seeking.

Thus, children are the point of the covenant of marriage. They are the fruits of marriage. Marriage is not about oneself but about the self-gift. This gift of self must be free, faithful, full, and fruitful. It is free because you cannot force anyone to love you. It is faithful because you promise a lifetime of love to your spouse. It is full because you give your whole self to your spouse and no other; and it is fruitful because it is a relationship which is open to life, to having and raising children together.

PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

God created marriage as the safest place for children. Marriage is meant to be the safest place for children to develop—emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Many attempts to raise children outside a truly loving marriage covenants have been attempted but often fall short as it is clear this was God’s design for marriage.

Thus, God created sex for marriage. God created both marriage and sex as good and interconnected in purpose; and God creates everything with a purpose. The purpose of sex, which is always meant to be in marriage, is for the unity of the couple and the procreation of children. Both are necessary. Created in his image and likeness, parents have the honor of being co-creators with God. It is part of

their wonderful vocation. Their children become the fruits and blessings of married life.

Children are the purpose of marriage. The openness to life is a key mindset for enjoying the gift of marriage. When couples are open to children, they do not see children as a burden or hindrance but rather as the gifts God meant them to be. This open heart can dispel other anxieties like challenges to worldly success, material gain, or negativity in general. It sets couples on the path to treasuring their children and introducing them to a loving relationship with God.

In fact, in the promises at the marriage ceremony, the couple makes the promise to not only be open to children but to have them baptized and raised Catholic. They promise to take on the responsibility of sharing their faith with their children as the primary educators of their children in the ways of the faith. This is no small task and demands all of our help assisting parents in this task.

DIGNITY OF THE PERSON

No doubt this also implies that every child has dignity since like their parents they too are made in God's image and likeness. From the moment they come into existence in their mother's womb, the moment of their conception, they have dignity. From womb to tomb, every single person has dignity and must be treasured and treated with great love and respect. It does not matter what the person can or cannot do. They have dignity because God wills their existence.

Because you exist, God loves you. And if God loves you, so should we love you. Love wants what is truly good for you. It is not necessarily giving you everything you want or ask for, but what will truly help you and make you more like God.

To become more like God means looking at God's design for us, especially manifested in Jesus Christ and handed on by the Church. If we wish to lead others to a truer sense of self, we ourselves must first discover that true sense of ourselves by learning who God is and who God created us to be.

God put us in the world to know, to love, and to serve him, and so to come to paradise. Beatitude makes us "partakers of the divine

nature" and of eternal life. With beatitude, man enters into the glory of Christ and into the joy of the Trinitarian life (CCC 1721).

This word "beatitude" means "happy" and "blessed." The "happy" life is the life lived in God because he made us in his own divine image and likeness. When we fulfill the design God has for our lives, we find true happiness here on earth (which may not be a blissfulness free from all pain but rather a true inner peace) and obtain the happiness that awaits us in heaven.

O – OUR LADY

Scripture Reflection

Luke 1:26-56

DIVINE MOTHERHOOD

And Mary said to the angel, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). By these words, Mary put her entire trust in God and agreed to his special role for her in God’s plan for human salvation. Mary’s role was unlike anyone else’s since she was asked to become the mother of the Savior of the world.

Notice the invitation. The Annunciation event (Lk 1:26-38) was not a demand or command from God but rather an offer. Mary could say yes or no. God invites her to plan a role in his divine plan of carrying the Savior of the world in her womb and give birth to him. She was invited to be the humble Mother of God—the “*Theotokos*” in Greek which means “God-bearer.”

This shows us that God does not force anyone to accept his divine plan or will. We are all invited to say “yes” to God and cooperate with him by our own free will. This is exactly what Mary does by those words in Luke 1:38. She allows God to work in and through her by the power of the Holy Spirit.

SPOUSE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Mary provides Jesus with a human nature by her powerful union with the Holy Spirit, and this union is nothing less than spousal. In fact, Mary is the spouse of the Holy Spirit. Mary is the first indwelling and temple of the Holy Spirit whose divine life is fully alive in her. This divine life conceives the Christ child by the power of her divine spouse, the Holy Spirit.

Since Mary is the spouse of God, St. Joseph takes on the role of protector and provider for the Holy Family’s earthly well-being. Throughout the Old Testament, sacred people and sacred things are set aside for God’s use alone. As the spouse of God who conceives the Word Incarnate, Mary too is set aside for God alone and thus remains ever-Virgin.

Mary's miraculous conception of the Christ child means Jesus is no ordinary person. He is someone more. Jesus is fully God and fully man. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that this can happen. The second person of the Trinity—the Son—takes on flesh in Mary and becomes human in every way but sin. This means Mary is the pure vessel honor which carries the real presence of God made Man, Jesus.

ARK OF THE NEW COVENANT

As a vessel carrying the real presence of God in her womb, this makes Mary the Ark of the New Covenant. The New Covenant is found in Jesus' full revelation of God which lives in Mary, and Mary lives in covenant relationship with the Trinity. She is daughter to the Father. She is mother of the Son, and she is spouse of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, the *Ark of the Covenant* was the place the Jews believed the real presence of God dwelt on earth. It was a gold and wood box containing: (1) the manna that their ancestors ate in the desert; (2) the staff of their first Levitical priest, Aaron; and (3) the stone tablets upon which Moses gave the Law and 10 Commandments.

In Mary's body dwells now the very real presence of God in flesh and blood. Inside the womb of Mary is (1) not the manna that their ancestors ate and still died, but the true Bread from Heaven, which you may eat and live forever (John 6:49-50); (2) not the sign of the old Levitical priesthood, but the one true High Priest, whose one sacrifice will end all other animal sacrifices (Heb 9:25-26); and (3) not the words of God written on stones, but the true Word of God in the flesh, who speaks the words of everlasting life (John 1:14).

DISCIPLESHIP

From her first "yes" to God, Mary was both Ark of New Covenant and first and most perfect disciple of Jesus. From the moment of the Annunciation to the birth of Jesus, Mary "kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). She is a model of meditation on the Word of God.

Mary was the first to care for all of Jesus' bodily needs—feeding him, clothing him, teaching him. She devoted herself to Jesus and prepared him for his public ministry and mission of the cross.

Mary played an instrumental role in Jesus' first miracle and manifestation. At the wedding in Cana, Mary encourages the mercy of Jesus telling the servants "whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). She leads others to obediently listen to the words of Jesus. We are told how Mary often follows Jesus around in his public ministry. So, she remains present among the disciples through those years of his ministry.

MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

This all shows how dedicated Mary is to Jesus; but it also reveals how special she must be to Jesus. This becomes explicit at the crucifixion. Mary and the Apostle John are present at the foot of the cross. Using his last dying breathes, Jesus dialogues with both.

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home (Jn 19:26-27).

This is not an ordinary conversation. Jesus, exhausted and broken, desires to give his mother to his disciples represented by John, the beloved disciple. Mary is now not only the mother of Jesus but the mother of all Jesus' disciples. She is Mother of the Church.

Mary's new role as Mother of the Church is an invitation for all disciples to take Mary into their homes. Mary will teach them how to truly live their discipleship and be devoted to Jesus. She will also intercede for them in all that they need.

QUEEN MOTHER

Mary has a special role in heaven as intercessor for the Church and the whole world. As intercessor, she is fulfilling her duty as queen mother which was established for David's dynasty and kingdom. The king may have had many wives,

but he only had one mother. Thus, the king's mother had a prominent place in his kingdom.

In the first book of Kings, King Solomon honors his mother by standing when she enters, paying her homage, and even seating her on a throne next to him. The reason she came was to make intercession for one of the king's subjects.

Then Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, and the king stood up to meet her and paid her homage. Then he sat down upon his throne, and a throne was provided for the king's mother, who sat at his right. She said, "There is one small favor I would ask of you. Do not refuse me." The king said to her, "Ask it, my mother, for I will not refuse you" (1 kg 2:19-20).

Jesus has fulfilled the promise that David's kingdom and dynasty would last forever. Jesus established his kingdom here on earth and in heaven. Mary is the Queen Mother of Jesus whom he has already assumed body and soul into heaven to be with him.

Mary was taken up into heaven after her earthly life was complete for multiple reasons. Mary was persevered from all stain of original sin since she needed to be the "pure" vessel in order to conceive the Word made flesh in her body. She was also the perfect disciple who always said "yes" to God; and she was so beloved by her divine Son that he wished to share her with all of his disciples.

Seated in heavenly glory, Mary is a reflection of our hope to come. She is seated as queen next to our king, her Son, in order to intercede for us. She is our mother too who wants to help each of us reach the heavenly kingdom by the path laid out for us by her Son.

V – VOCATIONS

Scripture Reflection

1 Samuel 3:1-21

CALL FROM GOD

The word “vocation” means a “calling.” In the Gospels, Jesus calls his disciples to follow him. This following Jesus is the goal of discipleship, which involves becoming *like* the teacher in every manner.

Yet, there are many different ways Jesus’ disciples do this: some were apostles, others martyrs, others evangelists, etc. Each disciple, in fact, has a different “calling” from Jesus according to his plan for that disciple’s role in building up the kingdom of God here on earth.

Today, Jesus calls us to follow him by fulfilling the special plan he has for our lives. Living out God’s special plan for your life is what it means to be Jesus’ disciple and follow him. It is what it means to follow your vocation. That vocation is your path to finding meaning and purpose in life. It is the true path to heaven for you, and it is how you are meant to make a difference in the world building up the kingdom of God.

UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS

It all begins with a *call to holiness*. It does not matter if God calls you to be a priest, nun, husband, or wife, every person has a vocation to holiness. True holiness means becoming exactly who God wants you to be, especially by knowing, loving, and serving him. It means truly becoming the saint God wants you to be.

Saints are the most unique and exciting people the world has ever known. They live the great adventures God has planned for their lives by saying “yes” to that plan daily. It’s not that they never fail or make mistakes but that they get back up and keep going, especially through Confession.

Their lives may not always be easy, but they are remarkable because saints come so close to God that they become their true self. Sainthood is when your own individuality reaches its perfection. There is no set pattern or single mold to becoming a saint. Saints are different because God needs them to be different.

PARTICULAR VOCATIONS

So, God calls us to particular vocations like marriage, priesthood, and the single and consecrated life. This particular vocation is our role in his kingdom here on earth and our clearest path to heaven. It is by giving ourselves wholly to this role that we obtain the sainthood we were made for!

In the married vocation, a man and woman make vows to remain committed to their relationship to one another and to accept children lovingly from God. This commitment becomes a great sign of God's covenant relationship with humanity. It is a visible sign of how Jesus loves his Bride, the Church.

In the ordained priesthood, a man dedicates his life to bringing the sacraments to God's people. Priests serve the family of God in the Church as spiritual fathers in the person of Christ. This is why they are called "Father."

In the single or consecrated life, men and women vow not to have an earthly marriage or many possessions so that they will have more time and energy to serve the mission of the Church. Some do this in family style communities, calling one another "brother" or "sister," while others live as single people in the world dedicated to the special role God has for their life.

MISSION

The reason God needs different kinds of saints and calls people differently is because there are different roles necessary for the mission of the Church. The saints have different personalities, gifts, and talents to build up the vast and diverse kingdom of God. That would not be possible if holiness was mere conformity.

The mission of the Church was given by Jesus to his disciples at the end of Matthew's Gospel. The mission was to go make disciples of all nations. Jesus sends them out with these words:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you (Mt 28:19-20).

Since people are so different, the Church needs different kinds of saints for God to move and speak through. Otherwise, he would not reach all their hearts. The saints, each seeking their own individual holiness, have an array of charisms and gifts from the Holy Spirit. Using these gifts and charisms, they are better equipped for *evangelization*—making disciples of all nations.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS & CHARISMS

St. Paul speaks about these spiritual gifts and charisms throughout his letters to his newly established churches. He does this because he views the people of these communities as “coworkers” with him in the mission of evangelization. While all cannot travel the world preaching the Gospel like St. Paul, he acknowledges that their discipleship plays just as essential and unique a role for building up the Church.

For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness (Rom 12:4-8).

To be part of the Body of Christ means to share the gifts and charisms that God has given you to build up the Body—the Church. This vision of the Church highlights that missionary spirit for all its members who are Jesus’ disciples. Everyone has something to bring and to offer.

DISCERNMENT

However, it can be difficult to discover not only what your gifts and charisms are but also what your vocation is. The process of understanding your vocation and even your gifts and charisms by listening to God is called *discernment*.

The first and most important way to discern is through an established life of prayer since prayer is conversation with God. To know what God is asking of your life, you must ask him and be ready to listen in silence. You cannot pray without silence in your life.

The next way to discern is through the sacraments—especially the Eucharist and Confession. You cannot see or hear God when sin separates you from God; and the Eucharistic Jesus speaks to those who seek him out. Asking Our Lady's intercession is another way to discover God's will for your life since she leads us closer to her Son and gains many graces for those who ask her.

Finally, you cannot discern God's will for your life without good information. You must learn what priesthood and religious life are all about, what makes for a good holy marriage, and why people consecrate themselves to God alone. You must also learning about yourself and make sure you are growing in the direction God wants you to grow.

GOD'S PLAN

God has a plan for your life. It is beautiful and wonderful beyond anything you can imagine. You cannot see it all right now because you would have to be infinite like God to do that. This is why you must keep discerning God's will every day. God unveils his vision for your life slowly when he knows you are ready for it. He speaks subtly and gently.

However, if your life is truly oriented towards God, you will not miss it! Do not be afraid you will not understand what God wants for your life. You will hear and understand. God knows you better than you know yourself, which means he knows how to speak so that you can hear him. As long as you are seeking God's will above all else in your life, you will hear his voice.

Like Mary, God invites all of us to respond to this plan he has for our lives. When we hear his voice, it is up to us to act freely and follow him. In doing so, we embark upon the greatest adventure we will ever know.

E – EUCHARIST

Scripture Reflection

John 6:22-71

HOUSE OF BREAD

In the town of Bethlehem, our Savior is born and laid in a manger. While these may seem like insignificant details, they are packed with meaning. In fact, the name “Bethlehem” means “house of bread,” and a manger is a feeding trough. These signify who the newborn Savior of the world is— the Bread of Life, the Eucharistic Lord.

SACRIFICIAL LAMB

The sacrifice of a lamb was the culmination of the Passover event for the Jews. An unblemished lamb was sacrificed, roasted, and eaten by a family commemorating the Jews’ Exodus from slavery in Egypt. At the first Passover, the blood of the lamb was smeared on the doorposts of the house; and the following morning, those who ate the Passover meal were liberated from slavery in Egypt.

Then, while wandering in the desert following this liberation, the Jews ate the “manna”—a “bread from heaven”—which God fed his people on their forty year journey to the Promised Land. The Passover lamb and desert manna indicate that God wants to feed his people.

So, when John the Baptist calls Jesus, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), we can see how God is bringing these Old Testament signs to fulfillment in Jesus, who is the true Lamb and true Bread from heaven.

BREAD OF LIFE

In fact, later on in John’s Gospel (chapter 6), Jesus himself will deliver a “Bread of Life” discourse. He states and restates several times how his flesh will be real food and his blood real drink; and eating his flesh and drinking his blood is what will give eternal life.

[Jesus said:] “I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world” (John 6:48-51).

The listening crowds do not understand Jesus and quarrel among themselves about it. Jesus hears this arguing but becomes even more emphatic saying: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you” (John 6:53). We are told that, as a result of this, many people walked away from Jesus and stopped believing in him. This is the only time the Gospels record such a large crowd of his followers choosing to walk away.

Yet, Jesus didn’t change his stands. He went so far as to ask his twelve Apostles: *Do you also want to leave?* But, Simon Peter answered him with faith: ““Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God”” (John 6:68-69).

LAST SUPPER

At the Last Supper before his crucifixion, Jesus brought all of this teaching about him being the bread of life to a climatic realization. He took the Passover meal to its final level of fulfillment in himself.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:26-28).

Jesus is quite emphatic that this bread is his real body and the wine of the cup is his true blood of the new covenant. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus concludes saying, “Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19).

MEMORIAL

When Jesus says, “Do this in memory of me,” he is establishing a “memorial.” For the Jews, a “memorial” was not so much a “remembering” as a “re-presentation” or “making-present-again.” When the Jews celebrate the Passover meal, they do not believe they are remembering something that took place a long time ago. They actually believe their Passover meal is making the Passover event present to them. They are experiencing it first hand through their participation in the meal.

When Jesus says to his Apostles at the Last Supper to “do this in memory of me,” two things are happening. First, Jesus is delegating his Twelve Apostles the authority to do this, that is, to transform bread and wine into his body and blood. But, also, he is instituting a new memorial that makes his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension truly present to those who participate.

This is wonderful news! Because, it means that you don’t have to be a first century believer to have been present at the events of our salvation like the Last Supper, Calvary, the empty tomb, or the hill of Ascension. God is so generous and kind; he invites people of all ages to experience firsthand these saving events!

SOURCE AND SUMMIT

This is why the Church counts the Mass and Eucharist (the real Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ) as the *source and summit* of the Christian life. This was described beautifully by the Second Vatican Council.

It means that a Catholic Christian cannot truly live the Christian life without participation at the Mass, without a relationship with the Eucharistic Jesus, or without a firsthand connection to the saving mysteries of our faith—Jesus’ Passion, Death, and Resurrection. The Eucharist and the Mass are our vehicles that take us there.

Understanding what we have in the Mass and the Eucharist can better help us open ourselves more completely to these sacred mysteries.

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

The first thing to understand is apostolic succession. Without an apostolic succession, we would not have the Mass and the Eucharist today. At the Last Supper, Jesus ordains his Twelve Apostles to be the first bishops of the Church to

“do this in memory of me.” They will, in turn, ordain bishops to succeed them. Those bishops will ordain helpers (priests) who can also celebrate the Eucharist effectively and other bishops to succeed them.

This line of unbroken succession of ordained bishops is what connects the bishops we have today to the Last Supper ordination of the Apostles. Because of this, we can believe what happens at the Mass today has the same effects that Jesus performed at the Last Supper.

REAL PRESENCE

When a validly ordained bishop or priest says the words of consecration over the bread and wine, they become the “Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity” of Jesus Christ. While they may look like ordinary bread and ordinary wine, once the bishop or priest prays these words, they are changed! And as long as they retain the “accidents” (the look, taste, and touch of bread and wine), they remain the Real Presence of Jesus.

This is why a candle is always burning at the tabernacle where the remaining hosts (Jesus) reside after Mass. This means that God (Jesus) is really and truly present in every Catholic church that has a tabernacle filled with consecrated hosts. For this reason, Catholics genuflect or make another sign of reverence towards the tabernacle acknowledging the real presence of Jesus there.

PREPARATION

Since the Eucharist really is Jesus (God), we ought to prepare ourselves whenever we receive him in holy Communion. St. Paul warns us: “For anyone who eats and drinks [the Eucharist] without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself” (1 Cor 11:29). St. Paul is warning us to be free from mortal sin when we receive holy Communion. We do this foremost by going to confession.

By going to confession, reading the readings for the Mass, and taking time for silent prayer before Mass, we can prepare well for receiving Jesus in holy Communion. The reception of holy Communion is meant to be a very intimate, unifying action. It is not to be taken lightly nor avoided out of fear.

Catholics who go to confession on a regular basis should approach holy Communion as often as they come to Mass. St. Pope Pius X encouraged Catholics to receive holy Communion more frequently but with the right intentions. He wrote:

“A right intention consists in this: that he who approaches the Holy Table should do so, not out of routine, or vain glory, or human respect, but that he wish to please God, to be more closely united with Him in charity, and to have recourse to this divine remedy for his weakness and defects” (*Sacra Tridentina*, 2).

We receive holy Communion first and foremost because we want to please God and be close to him.

LORD’S DAY

While Mass is available almost every day of the week, Sunday is the most importance day of the week to attend Mass because it is the “Lord’s Day.” From the beginnings of the Church, Sunday was honored as the day of Resurrection since it was the day Jesus rose from the dead. The early Church Fathers said the Lord’s Day was the day for gathering to celebrate Mass with other Christian disciples. Sunday worship at Mass is the fulfillment of the Commandment to “Keep holy the Sabbath.”

And just like receiving holy Communion is meant to please God and be close to him. Arriving early for preparation and staying after Mass for a prayer of thanksgiving make our worship of the highest love and devotion to God. By honoring God on the Lord’s Day, we grow in a right covenant relationship with Him.

ADORATION

While attending Mass and receiving Jesus in holy Communion is the highest way of communing with him, adoring Jesus present in the Eucharist has been a foundational habit to the prayer lives of many of the saints.

Either during exposition of the Eucharist in the monstrance or in front of the tabernacle itself, coming before the Real Presence of Jesus is a good recharge for

those seeking God's grace. Just like we find peace and strength in the presence of loved ones, we can do the same in adoration of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Like receiving holy Communion, the goal is first and foremost to please God and be close to him. This is why people make the sacrifice of time to come sit in his Real Presence.

EUCHARISTIA

The word "Eucharist" comes from the Greek word *Eucharistia* which means "thanksgiving." Whether we are coming to be with his Real Presence at church or to participate in the celebration of the Mass and receive holy Communion, we want to give thanks to God for this greatest of all gifts—the gift of himself. We are meant to become like God which means we are to become a Eucharistic People. This means we are meant to be a people of thanksgiving constantly counting our blessings of which Jesus our Savior is the greatest!

R – REVEALED WORD

Scripture Reflection

John 1:1-34

DIVINE REVELATION

Christian discipleship involves a covenant relationship of love with God. Like all relationships, how well you know the other influences how much you love them. The more you know someone, the more you love them. Intimate and personal knowledge is needed on both sides for a truly loving relationship to exist.

When it comes to knowing God, there are some things we can know just by looking at ourselves and the world around us. However, since God is infinite and we are finite, we cannot know God completely on our own. God needs to tell us about himself, and we in turn need to listen to what he says about himself. We call this level of sharing from God: “Divine Revelation.”

The word “revelation” comes from a Latin word “*revelare*” which means “to unveil” or “to uncover.” In its ancient context, it is a word used at a marriage for when the groom unveiling his bride. It is a very intimate moment; it is a “divine” because it is God who is doing the unveiling or showing himself to us.

JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the fullness of God’s Divine Revelation. God is completely unveiled in Jesus. He reveals God perfectly and he tells this to his disciples saying: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (Jn 14:9). Jesus reveals the one Triune God perfectly in himself since he is the God-Man.

As the Incarnate God-Man, who took on human flesh, Jesus reveals God in a way that we human beings can understand. Jesus is both the total revelation of God but also the perfect revealer of God. Through Jesus’ words and deeds, his signs and wonders, especially through his death and resurrection, he reveals to us who God is and how we are to have a right covenant relationship with him.

Jesus can do this because he is fully God and fully Man. He bridges the gap between the infinite God and our finite human nature.

WORD OF GOD

We often call Jesus the “Word of God” which was present with God the Father from the beginning of the time and who helped God the Father create the universe. The first words of the Gospel of John tell us this and how God became man in Jesus.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be... and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:1-3, 14).

The Word of God completes all other minor or lesser revelations of God. Whether it is God seen in the natural world, or manifested through miraculous events, or through the writings and prophetic words of people, all of them point to the fullness of Divine Revelation in Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

At the same time, we use this term “Word of God” to refer to Sacred Scripture, the Bible (Old and New Testaments). This is accurate since the Bible reveals who Jesus Christ, the true Word of God, is. And just like Jesus is true God and true Man, Sacred Scripture (the Bible) also has a truly divine and truly human origin.

AUTHORSHIP

The Bible was written by both God and human beings in a work of genius. This means that God inspired certain human authors to write about how God created us in love, how we wandered away from him, but how he sought to win us back. And all of this reveals exactly who God is—a loving Father!

The Holy Spirit moved the minds and hearts of certain human authors to use their own abilities and powers to write Sacred Scripture. The Holy Spirit did not whisper word-for-word what to write to these authors, but he also did not let

them write whatever they felt like only to stamp his approval on it later. It was a joint effort by God and man.

The human authors wrote as true authors, but they were moved by God to write only those things which God wanted recorded in Sacred Scripture. What God wanted recorded in Sacred Scripture was the Truth, that is, the truth for the sake of our salvation—what human beings need to know to be saved through the love of their heavenly Father. In this way, we can say there is no error in Sacred Scripture in regards to the kind of truth presented in it.

TRUTH IN LOVE

The truth in the Bible is about God’s love for humanity! The truth God wants to convey through the Bible is that even though we sinned and turned away from God, he comes to rescue us from our slavery to sin by sending his Son to die for us. In this way, there is no error in the Bible since there is no error according to the kind of truth the Bible is conveying – the truth about God’s love for us.

It is a truth relevant for everyone at all times; it is your story and mine. Thus, at its core, the Bible is truly a love story! And God speaks to every human being who opens their hearts and reads Sacred Scripture.

BIBLICAL “CANONICITY”

In itself, Sacred Scripture is a library of books composed from many different authors, written over different periods of time, and written in different genres of literature. These “inspired” books were collected from all other ancient books into a list or *kanon* (a Greek word for “measure” or “rule”) to be considered the “canonical” books of the Bible. Yet, not every ancient book is considered “Sacred Scripture” holding the truth God wants to communicate to us.

For the New Testament books, the criteria for considering a book “canonical” includes being considered “inspired” by God by the early Church Fathers, referring to Christ, having apostolic foundations, teaching orthodox doctrine, being used by a diversity of early churches, and being used in the liturgy of those same early churches.

For the Old Testament books, there are different “canonical” lists for Catholics and Protestants. The Catholic Bible includes seven more “canonical” books of the Old Testament than Protestants. This is because Catholics and Protestants use different criteria for canonicity. Protestants follow a canonical tradition much later than Catholics which excludes seven books; whereas, Catholics accept those books based on them being used in synagogue worship at the time of Jesus and including doctrinal ideas central to the teaching of Jesus like “resurrection.”

TRADITION

Many Protestants cling to a theology of "sola scriptura" which translates to "scripture alone." This belief rejects the authority of what Catholics call “Sacred Tradition.” The reality is: we need a canonical *tradition* to tell us which books are part of the Bible in the first place. Thus, Sacred Tradition plays an essential role with Sacred Scripture as a part of Divine Revelation.

The ancient world was one of oral traditions. Over time, these oral traditions were recorded in writing and then the Holy Spirit worked through the authorities of the Catholic Church to declare which books would become our Bible - the perfect cooperation of Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture.

For this reason, the Catholic Church has always held that Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition make up one sacred “Deposit of the Faith” for the Word of God. The Deposit of the Faith is simply the entire Truth God wants to reveal to us. Both Scripture and Tradition are needed to accurately understand and know the Truth God is sharing with us about himself. Thus, our interpretation of the Bible needs guidance from Tradition.

INTERPRETATION

Since Sacred Tradition is needed with Sacred Scripture to understand the Word of God, Sacred Tradition is necessary for interpreting the Bible. In fact, it is impossible to interpret the meaning of the Bible in the Truth God intended without the living memory of the Church’s Tradition. Scripture must first be interpreted in the context of the whole of itself but also according to the Sacred Tradition that comes from the Spirit led Church.

Jesus himself promised that the Holy Spirit would always lead the Church in the Truth that comes from him. He said, “When [the Holy Spirit] comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming” (Jn 16:13). This means the Sacred Tradition of the Church is living and developing over the centuries.

DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE

We call this the “development of doctrine,” which is not an evolution of dogma. As a development, it stays the same and does not become something different. For example, a baby is said to develop in different stages of life (infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age) but remains the same person. Another example is how an acorn grows into an oak tree. It looks very different at different stages but remains the same thing.

This is different from an “evolution” which involves becoming something different. Take, for example, the evolution of a single-celled ameba evolving into a rabbit. There are not stages of developments but rather new births to different things, not itself. Those things give birth to other things, not itself; until eventually, over many generations you have a very different species.

In the Church, one might consider the example of the celebration of Mass. While the Mass of today may look different from what the apostles did in the first century, it retains the essential elements (like the words of consecration spoken by the priest) but has unfolded into what God designed it to be today with all the music, responses, ornaments, etc. Certain practices may develop, but the theology does not change.

This distinction is very important to know that the Deposit of the Faith from the Word of God remains the same yesterday, today and forever in Jesus Christ.

IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

As mentioned above, the more you know someone, the more you can love them. Reading Sacred Scripture, learning about Sacred Tradition, and coming to understand the doctrines of the Catholic Church help us to love God more fully. In

fact, the entire Deposit of the Faith exists for the intimacy of knowing God. And the Bible itself is the apex of our love story.

Thus, studying the Word of God through Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the teachings of the Catholic Church helps us to truly know and love God. We can discover all the necessary essentials in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In fact, by studying the Bible and the Catechism, your faith will increase and your love for God will bolster. The more we know and love God, the more our lives will take on a right relationship with God and our neighbor.

CONCLUSION: MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

WHY DO I EXIST

Every human heart longs to know the answer to the question “why do I exist?” The Catholic Church unceasingly proclaims: You exist to know, love, and serve the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—God who is perfect and infinite love. You know that you were made for more than what the world has to offer; you know you were made for God. Only by fulfilling that desire for God in your heart is what will satisfy the deepest longings of your being and give your life purpose and meaning.

Answering the question “why do I exist?” is what our Catholic faith is all about. Catholicism seeks to show us who God is and how we are to live in right relationship with him through Jesus Christ. The rich depth of Catholicism expounds upon God’s Divine Revelation in Jesus Christ and expresses how we can live as Christ’s true disciples in the world today. It invites us to be part of Jesus’ ongoing mission in the world of revealing God’s love!

CLOVER MISSION

This reality is at the core of CLOVER. Our faith offers us perfect love; CLOVER teaches us how to embrace it. Each CLOVER principle summarizes a key way in which we can know God for who he really is and live in right relationship with him. This is the first stage of discipleship. Now that we have learned about the principles, it’s time for the second stage: *actively living them out*.

Christian discipleship is not meant to be relegated to the intellectual sphere. In other words, it is not enough to learn about our Catholic faith via the CLOVER principles. We have to act on what we have learned. Christ calls us to this action for our own sake - so we can *GROW CLOSER* to him while we are on earth and, ultimately, so we can be eternally close to him and happy with him in heaven. As such, we should pursue the truths we have learned about wholeheartedly - holding nothing back. We must each make our relationship with Jesus Christ the top priority of our lives.

MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

Our Lord also calls us to act on what we've learned through CLOVER for the sake of the Church. This means to build up the Body of Christ of which you and I are necessary parts. We can do this in two ways: first, by actively engaging in the life of our parish. The St. Malachy community needs your unique presence and the talents you bring! Second, by going out of our way to share our faith with others. This is truly the "missionary discipleship" every Catholic is called to. This might seem daunting. It is easy to assume "evangelization" - sharing the Good News of our faith - is supposed to be left to priests, religious, and parish staffs. However, the truth is, God often puts people in your lives specifically because they need your witness. They need to hear that the answer to their deepest questions can be found in the treasure of the Catholic Church. In a word, they need CLOVER! Now that we have learned so much about what God offers us, it's time to invite others to do the same!

We encourage everyone who reads this booklet to use it as a resource in both aspects of discipleship: building a personal relationship with God and sharing the Catholic faith with the world.

PRAYER TO SAINT JOSEPH

In honor of the Year of St. Joseph, universal patron of the Catholic Church, let us invoke the blessing of Almighty God upon each one of us, our loved ones, and parish family...

*To you, O blessed Joseph,
do we come in our tribulation,
and having implored the help of your most holy Spouse,
we confidently invoke your patronage also.*

*Through that charity which bound you
to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God
and through the paternal love
with which you embraced the Child Jesus,
we humbly beg you graciously to regard the inheritance
which Jesus Christ has purchased by his Blood,
and with your power and strength to aid us in our necessities.*

*O most watchful guardian of the Holy Family,
defend the chosen children of Jesus Christ;
O most loving father, ward off from us
every contagion of error and corrupting influence;
O our most mighty protector, be kind to us
and from heaven assist us in our struggle
with the power of darkness.*

*As once you rescued the Child Jesus from deadly peril,
so now protect God's Holy Church
from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity;
shield, too, each one of us by your constant protection,
so that, supported by your example and your aid,
we may be able to live piously, to die in holiness,
and to obtain eternal happiness in heaven.*

Amen.

Given in Brownsburg, at Saint Malachy's, on 1 May, the Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker, in the year 2021, the first of my pastorate.

FATHER DANDA