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✠ Most Rev. Thomas Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
August 22, 2008

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2 IN GOD'S Image

WHAT'S the ISSUE?

How do I know what's really important?

What's my purpose in life?

How do I know the right way to live?

Darryl was cutting through the park on his way home from school when he saw Aunt Peggy sitting by the pond, feeding the ducks. He sure was glad to see her today. As always, she gave him a big smile and then asked if he wanted to sit for awhile. As always, she asked, "So what's new in Darryl's world?"



Today, he just blurted out his frustration. "I am so mixed up—you won't believe all the stuff people want me to do. Hannah and Bobbie begged me to come to their house tomorrow because they are having a party. But Gerry had already asked me to help him study for our chemistry project because he knows I aced the last test. Then Mom and Dad said that we have to go visit Grandma Hoyle because she was feeling lonely. And that is only tomorrow! It seems like every time I turn around, someone wants me to do something or help out. I don't want to let any of them down. What am I going to do?"

Aunt Peggy looked at him with her calm, dark eyes for a moment and then quietly asked, "Do you really think you can meet everyone's expectations at the same time?"

Darryl didn't say anything, but he suddenly felt like a ton of weight had been taken off his shoulders. He shook his head and smiled a little. Then she asked him, "What are the things that are important to you?"

Wow. Darryl thought a minute. Maybe he should just relax, enjoy his aunt's company, and take time to think that question out with her. That's when he turned to her and said, "Can we go down the corner to get some ice cream?"

WHAT ABOUT IT?

- ▶ What effect did Aunt Peggy have on Darryl?
- ▶ What would have happened if Aunt Peggy had told Darryl she didn't have any time for him?
- ▶ What do you think happened next in the conversation over ice cream?

WHAT about YOU?

- ▶ What do you do when you are torn in different directions? Where do you go to simply talk or get advice?
- ▶ What helps you put things in perspective and figure out what really matters?



God, help me to know what matters in life.

WHAT^{does} FAITH SAY?

CONNECT

Trying to balance all the demands we have is hard. Having an “Aunt Peggy” in our lives can help us sort things out. God is always there to help us. We are created in God’s image, and he offers us his love and friendship. We can turn to God for guidance to know what to do and how to live our lives.

JOINED WITH GOD

Why did God create us?

We all have expectations put on us and our time. Our family needs us, our friends want to hang out, and our schoolwork takes time, too. With all of these expectations and demands, you might wonder what’s really important. How can you know what matters or make decisions when everything seems to have the same value?

Well, everything in life isn’t equally important. You’ve already experienced that firsthand. The challenge is to find out what really matters, and to build your life around that. You can have lots of things going on, and still live a life of purpose and direction.

Purpose and Direction

As humans, we all share the same purpose. By our very nature, we are made to have a relationship with God: to be his friend, to know him, to love him, and to help others do the same. This is our purpose and our calling in life. How we respond to the expectations placed on us, and how we create expectations for ourselves, should be based on which ones lead us toward friendship with God.

Because God wanted to have a relationship with humans, he made us different from the rest of his creation. You were made in God’s image and likeness, with a body and a **soul**—the spiritual principle in you that reflects God. With only a body, human beings would be like all the other animals. Because God has breathed his own divine Spirit into every human person, you are both a physical and spiritual being. You have an intellect that makes it possible for you to think, reason, and judge, and a **free will**—the ability to choose and make decisions on your own without being forced by instinct to choose or act in a certain way.




▲ *Hands of God and Adam, detail from The Creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel, by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564)*

This unique combination makes you an image of God. You are related to God. The journey of life involves the ways that you live out that relationship with God.

Jesus' Example

Jesus taught us what friendship with God is all about. He showed us how to love God by the choices he made, the ways he prayed, and the priorities he had in life. He showed us how to love God by loving others. He recognized the dignity of all people even when society did not. He welcomed people others ignored, he forgave people who were truly sorry for their wrongs, and he cared for people in need. He showed compassion. Jesus was also responsible to Mary and Joseph, and followed the rituals and feasts of his Jewish faith.

Having a relationship with God the Father was not something Jesus did separately from the rest of his life. It was part of who he was in his relationship with his family, friends, and followers. It was essential in the choices he made and the things he did, simply eating a meal with his disciples or performing a miracle like feeding 5,000 people.

 **SCRIPTURE** Jesus once told his disciples not to worry about what they were going to wear or eat. He told them, "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" He was not telling them that material concerns were not important, but he didn't want them to be constantly worried about such things. He wanted his disciples to depend upon God and to be focused first on God's kingdom. (See *Matthew 6:25–33*.)

CATHOLICS TODAY

Jesus shows us that our happiness comes from trusting in God and being one with him. This is what God created us for, and when our lives are lived with this purpose, everything else leads toward it. Jesus was able to model this relationship with God because he is fully human and fully divine. As Paul said in his Letter to the Colossians (1:15), Jesus was the "image of the invisible God." Through Baptism, we are as brothers and sisters of Christ. We are in some ways an image of the invisible God. Though not perfect like Christ, each of us shares in the image of Christ.

Faith Walk

Imagine your life with no expectations or demands from others. You have to set all the expectations for yourself regarding your home life, school, friendships, and relationship with God; however, you cannot set the expectations for how others interact with you, take care of you, and so on.

What expectations would help you be an image of God to others?

Next Step

CALLED TO COVENANT

What is a covenant with God?



Even though we are free to make choices, we do not always choose what is right. Sometimes we show God's goodness, and at other times we fail. Whether people are good or bad, God never stops offering his love. But people might still wonder, "If God is so good and loving, why is there sin and evil in the world?"

God created our first parents in his very own image and likeness. They shared fully in his holiness and goodness. They also shared in God's gift of freedom and, sadly, chose to disobey him. Because of their choices and actions, they lost the holiness and justice first received from God.

Yet, God remained perfect in his love for Adam and Eve. Instead of abandoning them, he promised that all humans would once again share fully in his life. He made a covenant with them. A **covenant** is like a contract between two persons, but it is more serious and heartfelt than a legal contract. It is a sacred promise or agreement between God and humans involving mutual commitments. In the stories of the Old Testament, God showed over and over that he will remain faithful to the covenant, even when humans fail in keeping the covenant.



SCRIPTURE

GO TO THE SOURCE

Read **1 Samuel 3:1-10** and think about how you would respond if God called you like this.

Called by Name

God often surprised people in the Old Testament with the way he called them to serve him.

- ▶ Jacob was chosen to be given the family birthright even though his brother Esau was older. (See *Genesis* 27.)
- ▶ God called Samuel to be a prophet, even though he was only a servant to the prophet Eli. (See *1 Samuel* 3.)
- ▶ God chose Jeremiah as a prophet, even though Jeremiah protested that he did not know how to speak. (See *Jeremiah* 1.)

God calls all people to live in covenant friendship with him. It is always possible to say "yes" because God provides help in showing how to live in this relationship. Many figures in the Old Testament showed what it means to be in a covenant relationship with God.

LIVING OUT THE COVENANT

Noah

- ▶ With his family, he trusted that God would keep them safe through the flood.
- ▶ God made a covenant with Noah never to wash away all living creatures on earth again.

The Chosen People

- ▶ They were the descendants of Abraham and Sarah, and God promised to make of them a great nation.
- ▶ Even when they turned from God, they were forgiven and called back to the covenant.

Moses

- ▶ God saved Moses from his abandonment as an infant and raised him to lead Israel in rebellion against their Egyptian captors.
- ▶ Moses then led the people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea when God parted the water.
- ▶ God gave Moses the Ten Commandments as a sign of his covenant love.

Ruth

- ▶ Ruth was a Moabite who became part of the Chosen People through marriage.
- ▶ She became an example of self-sacrifice and good moral character through her gift of faith in God.

Solomon

- ▶ As King of Israel, Solomon was noted for a wisdom that reflected God's care for the people.

Susanna

- ▶ She trusted that God's wisdom in the prophet Daniel would prove that the accusations against her were false.
- ▶ She became a model of truthfulness for her family and all people.

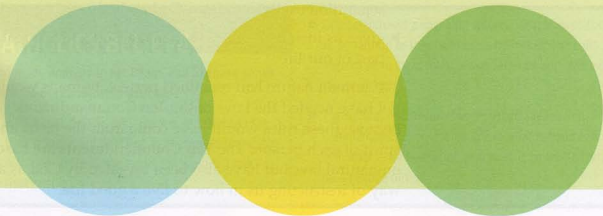
Jeremiah

- ▶ Though at first he did not believe he was capable or worthy of being a prophet, he finally put his trust in God and answered the call.
- ▶ He constantly reminded the people that God would remove their hardened hearts and replace them with new hearts.

CONNECT YOUR FAITH

List three responsibilities you have as part of your personal covenant with God.

My covenant with God calls me to:



GUIDED BY THE LAW

How does God's law help us?

CHECK THIS OUT!

The Ten Commandments are also called the **Decalogue**, from a Greek phrase that means “ten words.” The Decalogue applies to all human beings in matters that are serious and also in ways that are less serious but important. For example, everyone knows that killing is a most serious sin (Fifth Commandment). But the commandment also applies to less serious circumstances, as in hurting someone with abusive language.

The law serves as God's way of helping us live out the covenant and grow closer to him because it helps us recognize evil.

The law is first of all based on nature because it is through human nature that people participate and share in God's goodness. Natural law is part of the spirit of every person and shows that each person created in God's image has a fundamental dignity. This dignity is the strong foundation on which all human rights and responsibilities are based. Natural law is the foundation for the rights and responsibilities all humans share.

NATURAL LAW:

- helps humans distinguish between good and evil
- shows the way to put that which is good into practice
- is universal because it applies to every human being
- varies in the way it is applied because humans are asked to use the gift of reason to make choices
- is unchangeable and permanent throughout all of history
- provides the basis for all other moral laws and rules

Laws of Love

The revealed laws of God, like the Ten Commandments, guide us in making choices. Revealed law:

- ▶ shows us the ideals toward which we strive to live
- ▶ sets before us the virtues (like faith, hope, and love) that make God's image real in our lives
- ▶ helps us to recognize what is evil and what creates separation or division from God and others
- ▶ gives us insight about how to make God's love a real part of our life

If human nature had remained perfect, humans would not have needed the laws of the Ten Commandments because these rules would have come from the heart and spirit of each person. The **Ten Commandments** are based on natural law, but have also been revealed by God as a way of instructing us in how to live a good life.

God gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai so that the people would have a guide for learning how to live in God's image and follow the covenant—through their love for God (commandments 1–3) and their love for each other (commandments 4–10).

The Ten Commandments come from the Old Testament, but the two versions given have some variations. (See *Exodus* 20:2–17 and *Deuteronomy* 5:6–21.) Saint Augustine used the Ten Commandments to teach baptismal candidates and other members of the Church.

1. I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

4. Honor your father and your mother.

5. You shall not kill.

6. You shall not commit adultery.

7. You shall not steal.

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Faith Walk

You are invited . . . to be in relationship with God. Even though the Ten Commandments are very strongly written ("You shall not . . .") and may sound negative, they really are an invitation to love God. God loves us so much and offers us his promise of life. Our relationship with him is based on our response to his unconditional love.

When have you seen or experienced a human reflection of God's covenant love? How did that relationship illustrate his love and commitment? What effect did that love have on you or the others involved?

Next Step

CATHOLICS BELIEVE

God made humans in his image and likeness so we could be in relationship with him.

- ▶ With a soul, reason, and free will, humans can set their priority and direction in life toward friendship with God. Jesus is the model for living out this relationship.

- ▶ God established a covenant with his people, promising to be faithful to them and to be their God. God calls each of us to be in relationship with him and to honor the covenant.
- ▶ The natural and revealed law—especially the Ten Commandments—guide people in what is good and evil, what is faithful living, and what it means to truly be an image of God.

WHAT NOW?

LIVE OUR FAITH

- *Reevaluate your priorities.
- *Think about what it means to be God's friend.
- *Relax and think about the things that are good in your life.
- *Make a list of the ways that you think God has shown he cares for you.
- *Spend some time thinking about what your life would look like if God were not in it. Is it possible to think of life without God?
- *Thank the people in your life who show you what it means to be like God.

WHAT ABOUT IT?

WHAT about YOU?

- We have many relationships in our lives—with family members, friends, teachers, and others. Can you say that the relationships in your life are like the relationship God offers us—based on unconditional love?
- What examples of covenant can you name in your life?

- What makes it difficult to live according to the Ten Commandments?
- How can a covenant with God give direction to our lives?



PRAYER

God, we thank you for creating us and giving us life. Help us to bless you, and have faith in the plan you have for each and every one of us. Help us to remember that we are holy and chosen. Amen.

FAITH at HOME

At home, talk about the covenant you and your family members share.

How do you promise to love each other and live together?



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Saint Marcella

Marcella knew she was created to be in relationship with God. She gave up many of the comforts of life to give herself to God and his work. Because of the way she lived in faith and sacrifice, Saint Jerome called her “the glory of the ladies of Rome.”

Marcella was a wealthy Roman from a noble family. She married young, but she was widowed within her first year of marriage. The consul Cerealis, a leader in Rome, asked her to marry him. Marcella refused, choosing instead to live life humbly, with few material comforts. She invited a group of noble ladies to meet at her mansion. Together they lived a life of self-discipline and self-denial, giving themselves to the religious life. Her Aventine Hill mansion became a center of Christian activity.

Marcella wrote letters to Saint Jerome. Jerome gave much of his life to writing, and translated parts of the Bible. He gave guidance to the women by answering Marcella's questions about spiritual matters. Marcella learned from Saint Jerome, but was never afraid to stand up to him in arguments. She spent most of her time reading, praying, and visiting the shrines of martyrs.

When the Goths looted Rome in 410, they tortured Marcella. They wanted her treasure. But they let her go when they learned that she had given all her money to the poor. Marcella died shortly after from her injuries. She left no earthly wealth. But Marcella's relationship with God pointed her toward another treasure—a life rich in the Spirit of God.



Global Data

- Rome is Italy's capital and largest city.
- Rome has a population of about 2.8 million people.
- Rome is the location of Vatican City.
- Many Christians were killed in the Roman Coliseum during large-scale persecutions of Christians.
- Rome is known for its art and architecture, including the Roman Forum, St. Peter's Square, and the Sistine Chapel.

