

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Christians have reacted in many ways to Jesus' message of discipleship throughout history.
- As members of the elect, you are called to discipleship.
- As you grow in your faith, you will be asked to engage in self-examination.



Election: Saying "Yes" to Jesus

Maria is twenty years old and the mother of an active two-year-old boy. She works forty hours a week but still struggles to make ends meet. She left high school during her senior year.

Maria's parents begged her to remain in school, and her favorite teacher tried to convince her of the benefits of hitting the books and toughing it out. But Maria wasn't convinced. Working in the real world seemed to be the smartest choice. She'd still learn, but she'd also be making money and getting work experience.

Now Maria is beginning to wonder what would have happened if she'd said "yes" to finishing high school. It will be difficult to go back to school now that she's a mom with more adult responsibilities, but she feels called to say "yes" to this opportunity now. It won't be easy, but she still has her family's support for a new life experience she knows will help her.

- Have you ever said "no" to something only to find yourself saying "yes" to it later? Briefly describe the situation and what changed.



Jesus invited many to become his disciples and to carry on his mission after him. As the Gospels tell us, many responded enthusiastically—including some Galilean fishermen, tax collectors, and women. People from every walk of life accepted Jesus' call to come and follow him.

Not everyone said "yes" to Jesus, though. **Discipleship**—being a follower of Jesus—isn't easy. It requires a big commitment and saying "yes" to things not everyone was ready for. While being a follower of Jesus comes with all the blessings of eternal life, it's a decision that can't be made without some understanding of what it means. It's better for us to give an authentic, thoughtful "yes" to God than a halfhearted "yes" that means we just go through the motions.

- Can you think of some reasons people give for saying 'no' to their faith? Why did you choose to say 'yes'?



Rite of Election: An Opportunity for Commitment

"From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him...to lead others to the 'yes,' of faith in Jesus Christ. But at the same time the need to know this faith better makes itself felt."

On the first Sunday of Lent or close to the beginning of Lent, the catechumens celebrate the rite of election. Election comes from a word that means choose, and the whole ceremony reflects this theme. God has chosen us and called us. How have you responded to that call?

After the Church community hears **testimony**, that is, public statements from the catechumens and their sponsors on how the catechumens have chosen to respond to God's call, the community is then asked to accept those catechumens who are ready to receive the sacraments. The catechumens say "yes" by stating their desire to join the Church and then writing their names in the **Book of the Elect**.

The rite of election begins the stage of purification and enlightenment, the final stage of the journey for catechumens and candidates. You've asked questions about the Church, and you've become part of the community. Now it's time for you to examine your life and to think about what Christ asks of you.

At the time of Jesus, some said "yes" to his call, while others said, "no, not yet." What made the difference?

Today Christ has called you. How will you respond? As you reflect on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, have you ever used any of the following excuses when you felt Jesus' call?

"I will, but first..."

"Desire for true happiness frees man from his immoderate attachment to the goods of this world so that he can find his fulfillment in the vision and beatitude of God."

CCC 2548

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke both describe Jesus' invitation to potential disciples who say they desire to follow him but not just yet: "Lord, let me go first and bury my father" (Matthew 8:21). In Jesus' time, this meant "let me come after my father is dead." In Luke's Gospel, the hesitant disciple says, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home" (Luke 9:61).

To us, Jesus' response may seem cold and harsh: "Let the dead bury their dead....No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60,62). But what the Gospel writer is trying to tell us is that we can't follow Christ only when it fits into our schedule. We aren't true disciples of Jesus if we live as disciples only when it's safe and convenient. We have to follow the Lord's commands when we're out with our friends and when we're at home with our parents. True followers of Christ aren't part-time, only-when-no-one's-looking disciples.

When we accept Jesus' call we must do so enthusiastically, making it our top priority. The Galilean fishermen "left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:11). Matthew, the tax collector, "leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him" (Luke 5:28). Our family, relationships, hobbies, and activities, all take on their true meaning in our lives only when following Christ is our first priority.

"Some of Jesus' teachings are just too hard to follow."

"The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just."

CCC 1733

When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, he said many things that would have been hard for her to hear (John 4:18). But Jesus promised her "living water" that would keep her from ever thirsting again.

The Samaritan woman could have reacted with embarrassment, resentment, or anger. Jesus was asking her to radically change her life. But she didn't get upset or defensive. She ran back to her town to tell people Jesus was the Messiah. While the truth is often difficult for us to hear, we, like the Samaritan woman, must be open to receiving it.

"But I have so much stuff."

Of all Jesus' conversations with would-be disciples, maybe the one we can relate to best is the one with the rich young man who asked, "'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?...'" Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, 'You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions" (Mark 10:17–22).

In this conversation, Jesus is telling us that it's not good to become too attached to things. If we look to our stuff for happiness, we will always be aching for something more, something that really matters.

The rich young man couldn't let go of the false security of his possessions. He wasn't sure that he would find in Jesus, and within himself, something more valuable than his wealth.

This story challenges us to ask ourselves, "What things do I hold on to that may keep me from following the Lord? What do I own that is more important to me than God? More important than other people?"

"I do not know him."

Probably the saddest loss for Jesus came when, after his arrest, his closest friends ran away. Peter, who had sworn he would die with Jesus, denied three times that he even knew Jesus.

Many of Jesus' disciples thought he would lead Israel to glory and bring about an earthly kingdom. They weren't prepared for the truth of the cross.

It's easy to understand how frightened they were! None of the Twelve, except perhaps John, attended Jesus' crucifixion or burial. Just when Jesus needed them the most, they ran away and locked themselves in a room because they were afraid.

But not everyone ran in fear. "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala" (John 19:25). No matter what the danger, these women stayed by Jesus. These brave women stayed by him and later went out to the tomb to anoint his body (Matthew 28:1–10).

• *Is it easier for you to follow Jesus when it's the popular decision or your prayers are being answered the way you expect? Why?*

• *Have you ever said "no" to a cross Jesus asked you to bear? Why? Is it a decision you'd change if you could?*



Our Response to Jesus' Call

Jesus must have felt very sad as he listened to all these excuses, as he watched all the would-be disciples turn and leave him. Many of them almost said "yes," but out of fear or attachment to things, they said "no" to the only one who could give lasting purpose and direction to their lives.

Our prayers and practices during Lent help us discover the strengths and weaknesses of our own responses to Christ's call. There is a little bit of the *would-be* disciple in each of us. It's difficult to give an unconditional "yes" to Christ—to embrace the cross that he asks us to carry with him. But Jesus didn't abandon his disciples. He sent them the graces they needed to say yes again. God won't force us into discipleship, but he will answer when we say, "yes, but help!"

With a partner or as a group, list as many excuses for following Jesus as you can think of in two minutes. Then pick a gift or fruit of the Holy Spirit that helps overcome that excuse, and explain how. (Gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit are listed in sections 1831–32 of the CCC.)



What keeps you from following Christ more completely or consistently? Use the excuses discussed in the lesson to help you evaluate yourself as honestly as possible.



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