

Catechetical Summary for G.R.A.C.E. session

Date: Week of March 4, 2007 Catechetical theme: Conversion Event: Stations of the Cross

1) CONVERSION IS AT THE CORE OF JESUS' MINISTRY

If you were asked to give a one sentence summary of Jesus' teaching, you could say: "Change your lives. The kingdom of God is at hand!" That change of heart, change of attitude, change of behavior is called Conversion.

2) CONVERSION HAS TWO PARTS TO IT AND CONVERSION HAPPENS IN MANY WAYS

Now Conversion has two parts to it: a turning away from something and a turning toward something. We turn away from and "let go" of sin. That's one part of conversion. Secondly, we turn toward God, "letting go of our own way" and surrendering to God's way. We turn away from something that would harm us or limit us and others and begin to live in a way that is more life-giving and healing. We turn away from fear and move into trust.

Sometimes conversion means a big, dramatic, change. Take Paul's conversion from persecuting and killing Christians to becoming a Christian himself. Wow, that is huge, a complete reversal! Think about what it cost him—admitting he was wrong, losing friends who couldn't believe he was changing his life, having his whole life turned upside down. Have you ever experienced God asking you to change something significant in your life? But conversion is also about smaller, less dramatic ways we change. For example, when we try to be more attentive to our studies at school, or try to be more open to a co-worker.

Sometimes conversion is not a change from bad to good but from being a good person to being an even better person. Take Mary's Yes to the angel. That was a conversion. She wasn't a bad person. Quite the contrary! She was good. But by saying Yes to becoming the mother of Jesus, her life completely changed. The good person that she already was now became an even greater good, allowing Jesus to be born. Have you ever said 'yes' to God and found that it has changed your life from good to better?

Sometimes conversion begins with the awareness that we have been pursuing the wrong things in life. Take Zacchaeus. He lets go of his pursuit of making more and more money and finds salvation. Where are our priorities a bit messed up and we need to let go of some things, so as to be open to God?

3) CONVERSION IS SOMETHING THAT HAS TO OCCUR IN OUR LIVES AGAIN AND AGAIN.

And so in this first G.R.A.C.E. session we want to focus on the theme of Conversion and try to understand it for our own lives. Then we will look at the prayer ritual we call the Stations of the Cross as a way to help us say "yes" to where God wants us to change. To be Christian is to be willing to let God change us. Often. Again and again. Sometimes in small ways, sometimes in big ways. If we want to experience God's presence in our lives, we need to be willing to let God change us. But change is not easy. It is not easy to change hurt into forgiveness. To change fear into trust. To change what we are doing wrong into what is right to do. Such change costs us. In Christian terms, it means taking up crosses in life, trusting that the Lord will walk with us. For example, when a person—classmate, friend, your own child?—hits you with "I don't like you" or even "I hate you!" It is so easy to dwell on the hurt, to be angry, to want to retaliate.

4) DURING LENT WE FOCUS ON CONNECTING THE CROSSES OF OUR LIVES WITH JESUS' WILLINGNESS TO TAKE UP HIS CROSS. WE HAVE A SPECIAL PRAYER RITUAL THAT HELPS US DO THIS CALLED THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS.

We have a prayer form in the Catholic Church that helps us say "yes" to God in our lives, to turn away from doing wrong and turning more fully to God, no matter what difficulties we are going through, no matter our struggles. It is called the Stations of the Cross. Every Catholic Church and chapel and retreat center has Stations of the Cross. On the walls, outside, somewhere. Painted or sculpted. Take a moment to look at ours, the 14 traditional stations beginning with the first one on the west wall where Jesus is condemned to death and ending with the 14th on the east wall where Jesus' body is laid in the tomb. We focus on them often in Lent and especially on Good Friday. But they are part of our environment every time we are in a Catholic Church. We know they have to do with Jesus' life, particularly his suffering and death. But they are also about our lives. We will invite you to look at them, think about them, connect them to your own life.

5) WE INVITE YOU TO MAKE THAT CONNECTION BETWEEN PRAYING THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS AND THE LORD'S CALL TO CONVERSION.

Let's take the remainder of the evening to help each other appreciate what conversion is, how important it is, how good it is, and how the Stations of the Cross can remind us each time we see them or pray them—at home, at church during the Fridays of Lent—to be people who say "yes" to God, and allow God to change us.