

Faith Alive!

A Relationship with Jesus

**For an Adult Faith Formation Session
Appropriate for use as an RCIA Session**

by

Living Faith at Work

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Faith Alive! A Relationship with Jesus

Relationship with Jesus

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Notes for the Session Coordinator

- *Within this planned session, there are a number of activities. In addition, there are several alternative activities made available in the pages after the planned session. The session coordinator and/or the team should feel free to choose among the planned and alternative activities. The point is to adapt the session to the particular needs of the group expected to participate in this session.*
- In preparation for the session, read over the session agenda and all the session elements and note the materials needed for the session. Obtain the materials and arrange them for use as planned in the session elements.
- Use your usual meeting place. If this includes a special space for prayer, use that for the opening and closing prayers for this session.
- We suggest allowing between 1½ and 2 hours for the session. This allows for some choice in what you include or remove from the session according to the needs of those anticipated to be participating.
- Some of the activities are presented here as small group (5 or 6 members) activities and others as whole group activities. If your participants number less than 9, treat all activities as whole group, adjusting as necessary for that situation.
- Where small groups are able to be utilized, try to separate the groups with enough space to avoid distractions caused by overhearing what is being said in the other groups.
- The timeframes given on the working agenda are all inclusive, that is, they include the time that must be allowed for moving the participants into and out of small groups and the various locations utilized for the sessions. The teaching-learning activities ought not be scheduled or allowed to run through all the allotted time in each segment. People, especially adults, will dawdle as they move between activities or locations—the greater the distance the more they are likely to dawdle.

- Determine who will be the Prayer Leader or person responsible for conducting the prayer services during the session. Give them the prayer service materials in time to prepare for the planned rituals.
- For these sessions, it is important that the participants see work more broadly than as only a job for pay. As part of the introduction for the session, it would be helpful to make a few comments about what work is.

Very broadly Living Faith at Work defines work as any productive activity. This would include children whose work can be that of students and stay-at-home parents whose work is housekeeping and child rearing. It is also worthy of note that each person may function in several different jobs or work efforts in the course of a day. An adult might work-for-pay with an employer, work at home on house cleaning or yard maintenance, and work at parenting with his/her children. We humans also experience different work over our lifetimes from student, to employee, to parenting, and to grandparenting and supporting our adult children and grandchildren in many, varied ways.

- Ideally the Opening Prayer and Introductory Learning Experience would take place at or near the baptismal font in the church. If that is not possible or realistic given the time and space constraints, set up the prayer space as outlined in the Opening Prayer Service materials.
- If the meeting space is not conducive to setting up a table with the materials for the Jar of Life introductory learning experience as well as the prayer space set-up, consider using a moveable cart with a skirt on it to shield the materials from view.
- If the number of session participants is so large that they would not be able to see the Jar clearly, arrange them into their small groups around tables. Provide a large jar for each table and a set of materials for filling the jar. Perhaps have only the rocks (golf balls) and the jar on the table. Distribute the pebbles, sand, and water only as they are brought up in the reading.
- Allow more time for the Teaching Witness than for the Personal Witness as the Personal Witness tends to be shorter. Allow more time for the reflection activities than for the witness talks. Recommended times are 15-20 minutes for each of the two reflection sessions, 15 to 20 minutes for the teaching talk, and 8-10 minutes for the personal witness talk. Shorten the talks rather than the reflection time.
- Video of each teaching witness is available from Living Faith at Work.

- A short and a long outline plus a sample text for the teaching witness, “Encountering Christ: The Human Heart of God,” are included in the documents. The outlines are not intended to be delivered in totality. Rather the person giving this talk should select the ideas and method of presentation that would best fit the needs of the anticipated group. The preferred deliverer of this talk would be a priest or deacon of the parish. Alternatively, a pastoral minister who is not a cleric could give the talk. A DVD with a video of the teaching witness is available from Living Faith at Work.
- The Personal Witness talk is intended to be a sharing of one person’s efforts at recognizing and living in a growing personal relationship with Jesus. In the documents is a sheet with some ideas to help shape the presentation, but the key is the personal story of the speaker. A polished oration is not expected and probably would be less effective than the rougher texture of a personal, conversational sharing of the speaker’s efforts and feelings.
- The givers of both talks are strongly encouraged to practice their talks in advance with a fellow team member offering feedback and suggestions for improvement in delivery and for keeping the talks within the time limits.
- When the reflection questions for the teaching and personal witness talks are given out, it is very important to give the participants time to reflect privately and even write out a few notes about their personal reflections before asking them to share their thoughts. The first sharing should be in a pairing of two or three people. Such a small group serves three purposes: (a) it is easier to try out one’s ideas with just one or two other people than the full group, (b) it is harder to avoid sharing when there are only one or two others in the group, and (c) once a person shares an idea in a small group, the person is more likely to share it with a larger group.
- When bringing the entire group back together for the Sharing of Learning Reflections and Applications, lend some importance to the action by capturing the ideas in public writing.
 - We recommend having at least two writers, preferably three, equipped with markers (water based).
 - Space and equipment permitting, have chart paper ready on two or three stands and a writer/scribe next to each stand.
 - If space and/or equipment do not allow for chart paper on stands, tape chart paper sheets to the walls in two places (one place for Reflections/Learnings and another for Applications).

- Prepare the writers/scribes in advance to capture the speakers own words in so far as possible. Avoid summarizing and/or paraphrasing.
 - Put headers on the chart paper sheets to clearly identify them as “Reflections & Learnings” and “Applications.”
 - As the session coordinator solicits statements of Reflections and Learnings, assign them to a writer/scribe in rotation. Do the same for the Applications when they are given.
 - Use no more than 10 minutes for capturing Reflections and Learnings, then move on to the Applications.
 - Be sure to give time for private consideration and jotting of notes about the application before soliciting ideas for capture on the chart paper.
 - Consider taking the last minute or two of time allotted for this activity to summarize briefly the Reflections and Learnings and the Applications.
 - Save the chart papers for posting in the meeting space for the next session.
- In dismissing the group at the conclusion of the final prayer, encourage the participants to share a greeting of peace and thanks with several of the people around them. Allow time after the session and before closing the facility for participants who wish to continue talking with each other.

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15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Gathering and Opening Prayer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Registration & Hospitality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcoming statement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Greetings b. Identify key people of the session's program B. Group Formation C. Opening Prayer Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Move the people to the Prayer Space. 2. See separate file for prayer services 3. At the conclusion of the prayer, the Introductory Learning Experience can be done at the prayer space or the participants may return to the full group meeting space.
15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> II. Introductory Learning Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Jar of Life
70 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> III. In-Depth Learning Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Teaching Presentation: Encountering Christ: The Human Heart of God <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Whole group presentation 2. Distribute reflection questions at the end of the talk while giving directions for reflecting. B. Reflection on Presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal and private first 2. Shared in dyads within the small groups C. Witness Presentation: Growing in a Personal Relationship with Jesus Christ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Distribute reflection questions at the end of the talk while giving directions for reflecting. D. Reflection on Presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal and private first 2. Shared in dyads within the small groups 3. Shared with entire small group

15 minutes	<p>IV. Sharing Learning Reflections & Applications</p> <p>A. Whole Group Sharing & Reflection</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bring the whole group back to together and invite them to share some of the reflections they gave or heard in the small groups. 2. Have several team members write the reflections on chart paper as they are given by group members. 3. Suggest having the at least three sheets of chart paper taped on to walls and one writer at each sheet taking turns writing the reflections. <p>B. Reflection—Application Strategies</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. After about half the time is up or when reflections stop flowing, pose a new question for the entire group, “How can or will you apply the ideas brought forward today?” or “What commitment(s) are you willing to make about improving your relationship with Jesus Christ?” 2. Allow about 2 minutes for private consideration and note taking. 3. Solicit volunteers to state their responses to the question(s) and put them on chart paper as with the reflections. Do not attach names to the commitments.
5 minutes	<p>V. Closing Prayer Service</p> <p>A. See file for Closing Prayer Services</p>

Faith Alive!

Fundamental Purposes of the Faith Alive! Sessions

- To strengthen the **connection** between people's faith and work. (Work is defined as any productive activity we do.) [**Connection could be interpreted as interaction, interrelationship, and/or interdependence.**]
- To enhance parishes as formation centers which affirm, equip, challenge, and support believers in their daily life mission to live the gospel, especially at work

I. An examination of why our commonly understood Catholic Christian vision, at the grass roots level, needs further development for integrating faith and work.

A. Dualistic thinking

1. Sacred vs. secular or spiritual vs. material [This issue has existed throughout human history. Today's materialistic culture makes the issue particularly relevant for Catholic Christians today.]
2. Separating the divine from the human
3. Misunderstanding the American concept of separation of church and state

B. Tendency to view spirituality as fundamentally an interior, contemplative experience.

C. Failure to take seriously one's own ordinary life events including work as a way of encountering the divine.

D. Too much emphasis upon mission and ministry being directly related to internal church work or parish commissioned responsibilities.

E. Lack of recognizing one's work as a possible "religious" vocation, an opportunity to strengthen the connections between God, oneself, and others.

- Again, Mission has a church. The church belongs to the mission. The church equates to “the people gathered.”
- “Call” equals desires, gifts, talent, interests, skills. All God given for one’s unique piece of the mission. We are stewards of what God has given—the call and the mission. The mission is born of us. The church is the vehicle.

II A realization we, as church, are forming people as disciples in the world. The Faith Alive! sessions build upon the foundation belief that together we can continue to strengthen our focus upon the vocation and mission of the laity in the world.

- A. Emphasis upon forming people for volunteer or paid "inner/ecclesial church life and work" needs to be extended to formation for daily life and work.
- B. Recognition that the average lay person would benefit from learning more about recent church teachings on the role of the laity in the world, the call of lay people to be Christian influences in the social, political, military, economic, educational, medical, cultural, etc., spheres of life
- C. Need to foster approaches in Christian formation that are life and work-centered, that foster faith-inspired reflection, decision-making, and action in the midst of the marketplace (we can infuse much of this into what is already going on in parish formation of people).
- D. An opportunity to encourage believers to find meaning, value, and creativity in their work, experiencing their labor as God-centered, as a vocation, as kingdom building, as responsible and honest stewardship
- E. A call to lay people to further develop and deepen their own unique spirituality rooted in who they are and what they do, a stewardship of God’s gifts integrating personal growth and concern for the common good, grounded in scripture and Catholic Christian tradition.
- Integrating personal and social moral growth based on scripture and Catholic Church tradition.

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Opening Prayer

Prepared by Pat and Mike Flaherty

(If convenient, process from meeting room to Baptistry or the Baptismal Font. If not convenient, place a large, clear bowl filled with water on a table in the meeting area. Have the participants take the provided hymnals or song sheets with them. If the *Gather* hymnal is not available, use what you have and select the listed songs or ones similar to them.)

Gather around the Baptismal font or the bowl of water.

Opening Song: *All Are Welcome* (#753 in *Gather* hymnal, #406 in *Today's Missal Music Issue 2005*)

Invitation to Prayer (A reader selected by the Prayer Leader should read these passages slowly so as to encourage reflection on the symbolic meaning of water.)

“In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the Spirit of God was moving over the water.” [Genesis 1:1-2]

Water, symbol of life. * We are born of water, * In birth and in baptism, * We bless ourselves, * Bathe ourselves, * Refresh ourselves, * In water. ** We stand awestruck before the ocean, * Powerless before the flood, * Breathless before the waterfall, * As water reminds us of the awesome presence of God.

Opening Prayer—All

Lord, you brought forth water from the rock, You parted the sea and calmed the storm. Bless this water now, symbol of our very selves. Let it bring forth new life in us as we profess our oneness in Christ Jesus.

Reading by another selected reader

Galatians 3:26-28

Silent Reflection: (Play *Water of Life* by Stephen Dean available on the tape cassette *Come to Set Us Free* and in the CDs *Glory and Praise Second Edition, Complete Set*; *STMG Greatest Hits Vol. 2*; or *Today's Music for Today's Church*, 16 CD Set; all published by OCP Publications.)

Invitation by the Prayer Leader

Children of God, I invite you now to come forward to the water of life and, as you bless yourself with the sign of our faith, recall your own Baptism and your own call to clothe yourself with Christ.

(Play *Water of Life*)

Invitation by the Prayer Leader

As one body in Christ, let us say the prayer our brother Jesus taught us, Our Father...

Invitation by the Prayer Leader

Let us share a Sign of Peace with each other.

Closing Song: *We Are Called* (#718 in the *Gather* hymnal, #581 in *Today's Missal Music Issue 2005*)

Needed resources:

- Bible marked for the reading.
- *Gather Hymnals*. If this hymnal is not available, it may be necessary to select other, comparable songs from the available hymnals or in accordance with whatever music use licenses are held by the institution putting on this Generations of Faith session.
- Baptismal Font with Water [If a Baptismal Font is not available, partially fill a large, clear bowl with water and set it on table in a space in the meeting room where you intend to center all prayer ritual activities.]
- A CD or tape recording of *Water of Life* by Stephen Dean, available on the tape cassette *Come to Set Us Free* and in the CDs *Glory and Praise Second Edition, Complete Set*; *STMG Greatest Hits Vol. 2*; or *Today's Music for Today's Church, 16 CD Set*; all published by OCP Publications.
- 2 Readers
- Copies of the prayer read by all for the retreatants.
- Prayer Space prepared with the following
 - Music Stand
 - Cloth
 - Sandals
 - Bible
 - Candles
 - Bowl of Water

Faith Alive! A Relationship with Jesus

Introductory Learning Experience

The Jar of Life

A reader stands before the group but to the side. At the center of attention is a second person, standing at a table with a large jar on it. Under the table, hidden from view, are the other objects mentioned in the reflection experience. As the reader reads the script, the second person acts out the scenario described in the script.

Materials Needed

- Small table with a large jar (a gallon size mustard or mayonnaise jar works best; if one is not available use a large mayonnaise or pickle jar)
- Under the table, hidden from view
 - fist size rocks, enough to fill the jar (if a gallon size jar is not available, substitute smaller rocks or golf balls for the fist sized rocks)
 - box of pebbles, enough to fill the jar around the rocks/golf balls (large enough to be seen, small enough to filter down between the rocks/golf balls)
 - box of dry sand, enough to fill the jar
 - pitcher of water, enough to fill the jar
 - copy of “Jar of Life” reflection
- A reader
- An enactor

The Jar of Life

A professor stood before his philosophy class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly, he picked up a very large and empty jar and proceeded to fill it with fist sized rocks. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

The professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles rolled into the open areas between the rocks. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

The professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous "yes."

The professor then produced a pitcher of water from under the table and poured the water into the jar, effectively filling the empty space between the sand. The students laughed.

"Now," said the professor, as the laughter subsided, "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The rocks are the important things—God, your family, your children, your health, your friends, and your favorite passions—things that if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full. The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house, and your car. The sand is everything else, the small stuff."

"If you put the sand into the jar first," he continued, "there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness.

Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your partner out to dinner. Play another 18. There will always be time to clean the house and fix the disposal. Take care of the rocks first, the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."

One of the students raised her hand and inquired what the water represented. The professor smiled. "The water represents our baptism, our faith, our spiritual life. Pouring it into the filled jar shows that no matter how full our lives seem with rocks, pebbles, and sand, there is always space for God. Not only is there space, but if we allow it into our lives, our faith touches, engulfs, and enriches every aspect of our lives. We each have a lifetime supply of rocks, pebbles, sand, and water. The question is, 'How do we combine them? How have we brought the water of faith into our lives?'"

[This narrative adapted from "The Mayonnaise Jar," author and date unknown. The original is available from multiple sites on the Internet.]

Faith Alive! A Relationship with Jesus

Encountering Christ: The Human Heart of God

Outline of Ideas for the Teaching Witness

A note before beginning: This outline is not meant to be totally incorporated into the Teaching Witness talk. It contains many ideas from which the witness can choose those most appropriate for the expected participants and the witness. Leave time and space in the talk for personal touches. Be aware of the time limitation necessary for the session and limit the content to fit the time.

1. Christianity is not centered in rules and rituals. Foundation of faith is relationships (love God, love your neighbor, love yourself).

- God understood and experienced as Trinity: a communion/community of different Persons.
- The heart of all reality is relational—unity in the midst of diversity, recognizing and valuing our commonality and our differences.
- As individuals, organizations, as a planet and a universe, we are interconnected and interdependent.
- As humans we are made for relationship, we cannot develop a distinct identity except in and through the relationships in our lives.
- Human relationships are significant. Yet, these alone cannot fulfill us; we are ultimately made for a greater, transcendent love—one that is universal, unconditional, and everlasting.
- St. Augustine's realization: Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.

2. Christianity reveals a God who initiates a loving relationship with us, who desires intimacy with us, who wants to liberate us from sin and death, who wants to transform us into faith-filled, loving people.

- God will not force divine love upon us. Love of its very nature cannot be

forced.

- Our Creator, throughout human history, has actively pursued us, doing all that God can to get us to open up to the influence of the divine Higher Power and Ultimate Love.

3. Jesus Christ is God's ultimate expression of divine love for the world, of active involvement in our lives, of calling us to be transformed by the Lord's healing, reconciling, inspiring, guiding Love.

- In the Incarnation, God became physical because we are creatures of the senses who, at one point, need a God with skin on, a visible, tangible expression of the divine.
- If God became a human being, then it is very important to see what kind of human being God became! If Jesus is *God with us*, then his story is an answer to the question, "Who is God?"
- Jesus core message was and is, "The reign of God is at hand. Reform your lives and believe the Good News." (*Mark 1: 14-15*)
- Emphasis on God breaking through into human history in a fuller way through Jesus to call us into a covenant relationship.
- Divine initiative is dependent upon a free human response: Our turning away from being ego-centered, our opening up to and aligning ourselves with God's loving rule. Thy kingdom come means, "My kingdom go." It means our cultivating an ongoing experience of God's presence through specific practices and disciplines, such as prayerful reflection in the midst of our daily lives

4. At the heart of Jesus' teaching was the symbol of the reign of God. Taken from the Hebrew tradition, this symbol signifies what the state of affairs will be when God is recognized as the one on whom all of us set our hearts.

- As revealed in Jesus, God's will is our well-being. God wants the salvation (the wholeness, the healing, the reconciliation, the justice) of every person, of all of us together, of all creation.
- Examples in the gospel of people encountering Jesus, experiencing the presence of God's supportive and challenging love in and through him: the woman at the well, Zacchaeus, the man born blind, the lepers, the

woman caught in adultery, the Pharisees, etc.

- The cross is the way the kingdom comes. Through our baptism we are joined to the dying and rising of Christ—the example and the pattern for the whole of our lives. We are to die to our self-centeredness in order to rise up to the call to love even to the point of sacrifice.
- Through Christ's physical death and resurrection we believe that death is not a senseless tragedy to be avoided at all costs but the extraordinary experience when we fully open up to and encounter completely the Christ who *is* Life. Throughout life we are learning to let go, to open ourselves to the Good Shepherd. Death becomes that unique moment when the "yes" I have said to God all my life reaches its climax.
- To acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Savior is only meaningful insofar as we open up to his influence through the power of the Holy Spirit, to choose to live as he lived, and to order our lives according to his values.
- As church, we are called individually and together to *tell* and *live* the story of Jesus, to write the fifth gospel, so to speak. To tell the story of Jesus is to tell the story of *God with us*.
- We are the Body of Christ, each called to be a vessel through which God's reign (loving rule) breaks through into daily life. The same Holy Spirit who anointed Jesus and worked through him is moving within and among us, calling for our cooperation.
- In each moment of our lives, in every situation we encounter, we have the opportunity to choose our response. We can be the steward who tries to save the gift of God's love by hiding it—thereby losing it ourselves, or we can be the good steward who shares the love of our God and help build the kingdom of God.
- We are to be *centered* in a personal and shared loving relationship with Jesus Christ, who first loved us.
- We are to be transformed by our ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ in such a way that His love almost naturally flows through us to others. We recognize that we are being *sent* into the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to make a difference according to gospel vision and values.

Following are several additional or alternative concepts that may be used in place of or in addition to the concepts given above. However, the talk must not be given more time to include all the ideas in the outline. Select the concepts

that are judged to be of greatest benefit to the anticipated participants in this session and keep the talk to the assigned time.

5. Christian spirituality is a life orientation centered in God, influencing every aspect of a believer's life.

- We are to be *centered* in a personal and shared loving relationship with Jesus Christ, who first loved us. (*Spirituality begins as an interior conversion.*)
- We are to be transformed by our ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ in such a way that we see the world through God's eyes. Recognizing and cooperating with God's presence at the heart of all of human life, His love flows through us to others, and his spirit of integrity and justice becomes the way we live in the world. We realize that we are being *sent* into the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to make a difference according to gospel vision and values. (*Spirituality influences how we view the world and is the foundation for ethical living.*)

6. The journey toward living a deeply spiritual life within the Christian vision.

My journey is grounded in a healthy self-love rooted in God's unconditional love. With this grounding I am able to discover who I am with all my faults and limitations without being devastated—I recognize I am still loved and called to further growth. This awareness ought to lead to being able to accept the imperfections of others and lovingly call them to further growth.

- Become enlightened by the Spirit in order to be aware of one's own lack of freedom, one's own selfishness.
- Be conscious of and open to the love and power of the Spirit to guide, heal, and strengthen throughout the growth process—a divine/human cooperation.
- Develop an openness to the influence of the Spirit within relationships with other people of faith—share one another's freedom and un-freedom, gifts, and limitations.
- Refuse to be controlled by outside forces, seeing oneself as a victim. Recognize the greater influence of God's power and love.
- Be conscious of the pain/purification involved in growing spiritually, in letting go of self-centered emotions, attitudes, behaviors.

- Acknowledge that deep interior transformation does not happen superficially or instantaneously. There are no quick fixes.
- Growth in the Spirit should lead a person to deeper prayerfulness, greater appreciation for life, a deeper commitment to living faith and ethical values in daily life and work.
- Be aware of living out the Christian paradox, that is, a person saves one's own life by losing it, self-fulfillment comes through other-centered, self-giving and losing oneself in doing the Lord's work.
- Called to live in the world (total commitment to life, people, environment) but not be of the world (caught up in selfish attitudes and acquisitions).
- Encouraged to develop the ability to be reflective and contemplative, to be more aware of and open to the Lord's presence in the midst of daily activity. Ask oneself, "What might God be saying to me through what is occurring? How is the Spirit calling me to grow? How am I being prompted to respond? Will I?"
- In each moment of our lives, in every situation we encounter, we have the opportunity to choose our response. We can be the steward who tries to save the gift of God's love by hiding it—thereby losing it ourselves, or we can be the good steward who shares the love of our God and help build the kingdom of God.
- Each person grows spiritually according to the uniqueness of this person here and now, in this situation, in this community.

Faith Alive! A Relationship with Jesus

Encountering Christ: The Human Heart of God

Sample Teaching Talk

by Robert Bender

Introduction

This is a story that happened in a country in the Far East with a lot of poor people. On a railroad track where the station was located there were many vendors selling various things. And there was one boy there with a cartload of fruit that he was selling. It was very crowded and some people came rushing along to catch the train just before it left. But as they rushed by, they hit his cart and knocked it over and all of the vegetables and fruits rolled everywhere. The youngster was very distraught and began to bend over to pick things up, trying to put it together again. As he was doing it, one person who had rushed by came back to help the youngster. Then he noticed something about the little boy; he was blind, which made it even more tragic. But, finally, he helped him put everything together back in the cart. And as he was ready to leave, the youngster asked him, “Are you Jesus? Are you Jesus?”

The story does not go on to say how the individual who helped the boy responded. Nor do we know for sure what motivated the person to return to help him. We do know, though, that no matter how the helper responded and no matter what might have motivated him to do so, the boy did indeed encounter Jesus on that day.

I want to share with you some ideas about how we encounter Jesus. These ideas come from a variety of sources and from me. In the end, all of this

has to make sense for me as an individual and for you as an individual. I would be misleading you if you conclude that this all makes sense to me all of the time. I struggle with this all of the time. I take some solace that God is not through with me yet. I am convinced that the spiritual life is all about “seeing”. Somewhere scripture assures us that what we see only dimly now but when we enter the fullness of eternal life we will see clearly. I sincerely hope that this is so.

Sacramentality: Church as Sacrament

Our Catholic sacramental view unveils deep mystery in all that appears ordinary. It is our sacramental conviction that the infinite, invisible God is present and redemptively active in the finite, visible, human realities of this world, and especially in human persons who embody and practice the goodness and love of God. At the heart of this distinctively Catholic sacramental perspective is the belief that God’s presence and redemptive activity have been supremely – and uniquely – embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, whose “mystical body” and fundamental sacrament the Church is. To say that the church is the sacrament of Jesus, is to boldly say that the church not only **REVEALS** or **MANIFESTS** the risen Christ, but actually **CARRIES OUT** and **ACCOMPLISHES** Christ’s saving work. The Church does today what Jesus did in his lifetime: the Church forgives sins, heals peoples hurts, establishes God’s kingdom of justice, and peace, and love in our world, leads people to know and love God, and helps folks in countless ways in their pilgrimage through this life. The Church as the sacrament of Christ mirrors Christ and makes Christ present today.

And before all else, **THE CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE**. Jesus formed a community around himself, animated it, and then left it his word, his spirit, and

the Eucharist. That community, that body of believers (the body of Christ), is the Church.

We Are the Body of Christ

Scripture uses the expression the “*Body of Christ*” to mean three things: **JESUS**, the historical person who walked the streets of Palestine for 33 years, or so, more than 2,000 years ago, the **EUCCHARIST** which is also the physical presence of God among us, and the **BODY OF BELIEVERS** which is also the real presence. We Christians believe in a God in heaven who is also physically present on this earth inside of human beings and we human beings live out our lives in community, in relationship with one another. The foundation of our faith, therefore, is **RELATIONAL**. God is present in the normal flow of life within human relationships. If we believe that God is incarnate in ordinary life (and we do), then we should seek God within ordinary life.

The apostle Paul says simply and directly: “*We are Christ’s body...*” (1 Corinthians 12:27 and 6:15). If we believe this, and if we see this, then we must become as St. Teresa of Avila so simply put it: God’s physical hands, feet, mouthpiece, and heart in this world. We must choose to live our lives as he lived. Our task is to radiate the compassion and love of God, as manifest in Jesus, in our faces and our actions. We must give a human face to divine compassion and forgiveness. We have to carry his incarnation forward in the circumstances of our lives.

The Kingdom of God

We are the Body of Christ. We believe that the kingdom of God broke definitively into human history through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And although we are a pilgrim people journeying toward the time when Jesus comes again and the kingdom of God is established in its fullness

for all eternity, we are not just passing time idly. Each of us is called to be a vessel through which the kingdom of God breaks through in our daily lives. If you think about it, you have all experienced this breaking through of the kingdom of God. While this may have been in extraordinary manifestations of power or glory, it is even more likely to have been experienced through the small, everyday occurrences of our lives. Think about those times when you have received a small act of kindness for no reason other than you are loved. You have done this yourself countless times. At work, you may have stood up for someone with little power or authority and made them feel special. One time at my workplace employees pooled their unused sick leave and gave the hours to a fellow employee so she could visit her dying sister in England. I know that you have sacrificed mightily for the well-being of your children and I know that the first time you laid eyes upon your child you knew that you would move heaven and earth if you could to protect your baby from any misfortune and that you would gladly take on any illness or misfortune in her or his stead, if you could. People of faith understand these things as the breaking through of the kingdom of God. It is how we become Christ for one another. It is how we encounter Jesus in the ordinary circumstances of our lives. It is how we experience the human heart of God.

Magic Eye

I would not be surprised if these sorts of occurrences in your life are not necessarily felt to be **RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES**. Remember that the spiritual life is all about seeing and we must develop our capacity to see.

Let's look at this poster. At first glance, this appears to be a one-dimensional poster of pictures of children arranged in horizontal rows. And sure enough, it is. If, however, you train your eyes to look beyond what is on

the surface, you will experience a depth to the picture that is not immediately apparent. While this may be difficult at first, after a while your eyes become almost immediately attuned to the depth within the picture to such a degree that you cannot not see it. And soon you can access the depth experience easily for all “Magic Eye” posters.

To encounter Christ in the ordinary circumstances of our life, we must develop the spiritual discipline of seeing Christ in the ordinary circumstances of our life. It is our fervent wish that this weekend will equip you with a new or refined lens through which to interpret the circumstances of your day-to-day life, especially those human encounters through which we experience Jesus Christ, the very heart of God.

A King and a Peasant

I would like to finish with a final story. It is called: “A King and a Peasant.”

God decided to become visible to a king and a peasant and sent an angel to inform them of the blessed event. “O king,” the angel announced. “God has deigned to be revealed to you in whatever manner you wish. In what form do you want God to appear?”

Seated pompously on his throne and surrounded by awestruck subjects, the king royally proclaimed: “How else would I wish to see God, save in majesty and power? Show God to us in the full glory of power.”

God granted his wish and appeared as a bolt of lightning that instantly pulverized the king and his court. Nothing, not even a cinder, remained.

The angel then manifested herself to a peasant saying: "God deigns to be revealed to you in whatever manner you desire. How do you wish to see God?"

Scratching his head and puzzling a long while, the peasant finally said: "I am a poor man and not worthy to see God face to face. But if it is God's will to be revealed to me, let it be in those things with which I am familiar. Let me see God in the earth I plough, the water I drink, and the food I eat. Let me see the presence of God in the faces of my family, neighbors, and - if God deems it as good for myself and others - even in my own reflection as well."

God granted the peasant his wish, and he lived a long and happy life.

End – (Magic Eye Poster)

Faith Alive! A Relationship with Jesus

Growing in a Personal Relationship with Jesus Christ

A note before beginning: These potential starting points are not meant to be totally incorporated into the Witness talk. They contain many ideas from which the witness can choose those that best tell the witness' personal story about growing in his/her personal relationship with Jesus. Also, the witness is not limited to these prompts but can bring in similar ideas as appropriate. Be aware of the time limitation necessary for the session and limit the content to fit the time.

- Deal with the concept of a “personal relationship with Jesus Christ”—what does that mean to you? How do you define it? How do you “feel” it? How do you become aware of it?
- How did you come to and grow in this relationship with God? What role did the presence and example of Christ on earth play in developing your relationship—from your perspective? What about the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? What about the presence of Christ and the inspiration of the Spirit presented in the lives of others in your life?
- Where are you in the realization that growing in relationship with Christ is a lifelong journey, that spiritual development is an everyday, up-and-down, comfortable and uncomfortable process (a dying to self in order to be fully alive in the Spirit)? Share what reminds you of your developing relationship with Jesus.
- Acknowledge that sometimes you can be oblivious to the Lord's presence and/or resistant to his will. Share when and how you get beyond your self-pre-occupation.
- Give witness to the positive difference the Lord has made in your inner attitudes, motivations, and feelings and in your outer actions. Talk about “When I let him in, when I am centered in his loving presence, and when I recognize I am sent to be an instrument of his integrity and love.”

Questions That Will Be Used for Reflection and Dialogue after the Talk

1. What in this talk spoke directly and personally to me?
2. When in my daily life do I find myself aware of the presence of Jesus Christ? What helps bring that awareness about?
3. Do I want to have a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ? If so, why?
4. How would my daily life be different if I were aware of Jesus Christ's presence on a more regular basis?

Faith Alive! A Relationship with Jesus

Closing Prayer

Prepared by Pat and Mike Flaherty

(In the meeting room at the space designated for prayer rituals)

Opening Prayer

Leader: O God, come to my assistance.

Response: Lord, make haste to help me.

All: Glory be to the Father....Amen.

Reading by one reader

Luke 12:32-34

Closing Prayer I

Leader: Let us pray.

All: Jesus, our brother, today we have considered our relationship with you and we thank you for this Generations of Faith experience. As we go forward from this session, we have made stewardship commitments toward living with the unending treasure you have gained for us. Help us keep these commitments so that the water of faith may touch and act upon every aspect of our lives.

We ask this in your name. Amen.

Needed resources

- A Reader
- Copies of the prayer read by all for the participants.

Faith Alive! A Relationship with Jesus

Materials list for this Session

For the Gathering and Opening

- Sign-in sheet (if desired)
- Name tags and markers (if desired)

For Prayer Space

- Bowl of Water
- Music Stand
- Cloth
- Sandals
- Bible
- Candles

For the Opening Prayers

- Bible marked for the reading.
- *Gather Hymnals*. If this hymnal is not available, it may be necessary to select other, comparable songs from the available hymnals or in accordance with whatever music use licenses are held by the institution putting on this Generations of Faith session.
- Baptismal Font with Water [If a Baptismal Font is not available, partially fill a large, clear bowl with water and set it on table in a space in the meeting room where you intend to center all prayer ritual activities.]
- A CD or tape recording of *Water of Life* by Stephen Dean, available on the tape cassette *Come to Set Us Free* and in the CDs *Glory and Praise Second Edition, Complete Set*; *STMG Greatest Hits Vol. 2*; or *Today's Music for Today's Church, 16 CD Set*; all published by OCP Publications.
- 2 Readers
- Copies of the prayer read by all for the retreatants.

For the Introductory Learning Experience

- Small table with a large jar (a gallon size mustard or mayonnaise jar works best; if one is not available use a large mayonnaise or pickle jar)
- Under the table, hidden from view
 - fist size rocks, enough to fill the jar (if a gallon size jar is not available, substitute smaller rocks or golf balls for the fist sized rocks)
 - box of pebbles, enough to fill the jar around the rocks/golf balls (large enough to be seen, small enough to filter down between the rocks/golf balls)
 - box of dry sand, enough to fill the jar
 - pitcher of water, enough to fill the jar
 - copy of “Jar of Life” reflection
- A reader
- An enactor

For the Teaching and Personal Witness talks: copies of the outlines and related information about the talks.

For the Reflections

Copies of the reflection questions
Pencils

For the Sharing of Learning Reflections

Chart paper (use Post-it chart paper or have masking tape available to tape the paper to the walls)
Markers (water based so they do not bleed through the chart paper)

For the closing Prayer Ritual

- A Reader
- Copies of the prayer read by all for the retreatants.

Encourage further exploration of the Living Faith at Work concepts by including the Living Faith at Work website flyer. The website is at <http://www.livingfaithatwork.org>.

Include an abstract of the teaching talk, *Encountering Christ, the Human Heart of God*.

Faith Alive! A Relationship with Jesus

ADDITIONAL OR ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

These activities could be used after the teaching and personal witness talks to help the participants personalize the concept of prioritizing the things in their life.

Create a Personal Jar of Life

- Provide a mason jar for each person along with golf balls, pebbles, sand in separate packets, and a permanent marker.
- Perhaps have the participants label the golf balls with the names of the big things in their lives.
- The participants then fill their personal jars with their big things, smaller things, and the water of their faith, sharing what they are with those in their group.

Create a Reminder of the Big Things in Life

- Provide a each person with one or two smooth pebbles to carry or place where they will come across them frequently. For example, they could place them on their desk at work, on their dresser at home, on their kitchen counter, or on the family's usual meal table.
- Before pocketing the pebbles, the participants could be asked to label the pebble with the name of the big thing(s) it represents to them. It should represent a part of the person's life that he/she needs or wishes to keep his/her focus on.
- The participants share with their group the meaning they are giving to their pebbles.

Faith Alive! A Relationship with Jesus

Encountering Christ: The Human Heart of God

Abstract

1. Christianity is not centered in rules and rituals. The foundation of faith is relationships (love God, love your neighbor, love yourself).
2. Christianity reveals a God who initiates a loving relationship with us, who desires intimacy with us, who wants to liberate us from sin and death, who wants to transform us into faith-filled, loving people.
3. Jesus Christ is God's ultimate expression of divine love for the world, of active involvement in our lives, of calling us to be transformed by the Lord's healing, reconciling, inspiring, guiding Love.
4. At the heart of Jesus' teaching was the symbol of the reign of God. Taken from the Hebrew tradition, this symbol signifies what the state of affairs will be when God is recognized as the one on whom all of us set our hearts.
5. Christian spirituality is a life orientation centered in God, influencing every aspect of a believer's life.
6. Our journey is one toward living a deeply spiritual life within the Christian vision.

<http://www.livingfaithatwork.org>

The Living Faith at Work website [<http://www.livingfaithatwork.org>] contains more information, individual activities, and small group activities.

There you will find

- Materials for use by individuals. These may also be used in small groups as discussion starters.
- Materials for facilitators of small groups including some suggestions on facilitating small groups. Abstracts and reflection/discussion questions for several books related to living our faith in our daily lives are included.
- A list of suggested readings.
- A PowerPoint slide show about Living Your Faith at Work.
- Homilies or homily notes for the Sundays before St. Joseph the Worker and Labor Day from the past several years.
- Information and Internet links related to Catholic Social Teachings.
- Contact information for Living Faith at Work.
- Internet links to a variety of websites that contain information, prayers, reflections, activities, and even more Internet links related to living a life faithful to the Catholic Faith.

<http://www.livingfaithatwork.org>