

## Developing Christian Disciplines / Life Skills for Roman Catholics

Jesus calls us to consider our life as a relationship of faith through Him with the Father in our daily life. Each day provides many points at which we can deliberately try to remain open to God, to seek his will, and to live all things in communion with the Holy Trinity. Our activity and preoccupations are not distractions from God's love but opportunities to live by his grace and empowerment. Within our deepest desires we can ask the Holy Spirit to show us how the Word of God sheds light on our life at every moment. It takes time to allow the Holy Spirit to train us in this spiritual skill. In this way we avoid drudgery and remain vital and empowered by God's grace to become holy and bear the fruits of love and mercy, justice and peace.

**ABOUT DESIRE** – Here is some of what St. Augustine wrote to Proba:

*“Why he should ask us to pray, when he knows what we need before we ask him, may perplex us if we do not realize that our Lord and God does not want to know what we want (for he cannot fail to know it) but wants us rather to exercise our desire through our prayers, so that we may be able to receive what he is preparing to give us. His gift is very great indeed, but our capacity is too small and limited to receive it. That is why we are told: Enlarge your desires, do not bear the yoke with unbelievers.*

*The deeper our faith, the stronger our hope, the greater our desire, the larger will be our capacity to receive that gift, which is very great indeed. No eye has seen it; it has no color. No ear has heard it; it has no sound. It has not entered man's heart; man's heart must enter into it.*

*In this faith, hope and love we pray always with unwearied desire. However, at set times and seasons we also pray to God in words, so that by these signs we may instruct ourselves and mark the progress we have made in our desire, and spur ourselves on to deepen it. The more fervent the desire, the more worthy will be its fruit. When the Apostle tells us: Pray without ceasing, he means this: Desire unceasingly that life of happiness which is nothing if not eternal, and ask it of him who alone is able to give it.”*

**SPIRITUALITY** – Christian disciplines – a more deliberate effort to follow the Lord Jesus

To achieve life goals we need to select appropriate means. For our life of faith we do well to learn from the disciplines our Teacher Jesus practiced and invites us to practice; so that in following Him we may allow Him to guide us into the abundant life the Father desires for us, our spouse, and our family. In the "Karate Kid" movie the master has the boy do manual labour for certain moves to strengthen specific muscles to discipline karate stances and moves. It is like this the discipline of the Catholic Christian faith. The Mass, the Bible, the Rosary, and other forms of prayer draw us more personally into the life and mystery of the Holy Trinity.

**FOLLOWING JESUS** – We resist all other voices that would distract us from obeying and loving God

The first meaning of “disciplines” is not rigorous tasks or punishment but developing and using our faith life skills as disciples of Jesus. What is Christian discipleship anyway? It is simply coming to Jesus and following Him who is sent out of love by the Father to us personally and to all of us together to lead us into the life and love of God the Father in the Holy Spirit. To put it the most simply, to follow Jesus is to allow Him to lead us into the intimate life and love of the Holy Trinity. This gives us a taste Heaven on Earth. God gives us divine grace to empower us to put sinful ways behind us and instead to walk in God's ways as Jesus did. Disciples follow Jesus and learn from watching Him. We too are called to learn from Jesus first but also from others who follow Him. Jesus then guides us to freely develop our own Christian rule of life in order to live our life with trust in the Father, obedience to Jesus as Lord, and docility to the Holy Spirit. As we live through our days, from when we prepare ourselves for sleep at night, through the night, to the time we open our eyes in the morning and then all through the day, we have countless and infinitely varied opportunities to live our life in the company of the three divine persons of the Holy Trinity; rather than try to do it all on our own.

**DISCIPLINE** – with our eyes on the goal we choose appropriate means to get there and practice them...

In – **Disciplines for Christian Living** – Fr. Thomas Ryan, CSP, a Paulist priest, reflects on the value for each Christian of developing discipline for a more abundant and satisfying life of faith in the life areas of:

1. **friendship & family life** (the value of cultivating real connections with a few friends and with the members of our family wherever this is possible),
2. **living with a Sabbath rhythm** (trying to rest – to pray and play including Sunday worship – for one whole day in connection with the Lord’s Day),
3. **exercise & play** (our bodies were made to be active and this is a way to manage our moods is to engage in gratuitous exercise on a regular basis with the whole body in motion),
4. **prayerful presence** (prayer is really visiting with God, with the three divine Persons, and we can do that formally at prayer time but also informally during each activity of our day),
5. **fasting** (allowing the body to get in sync with the hunger and thirst in our soul to be more aware of God),
6. **service** (one of the best ways to avoid excessive preoccupation with ourselves is to serve others with all of our attention focused in love for those we are serving, attending tenderly to them), and
7. **vision of Christian faith** (accepting to let Jesus open up within us his own wide view of life and love – St. Pope John Paul II spoke and wrote about living our life like Jesus according to the “law of the gift”, that is, filled with God’s love and life we have the power to live our life as a gift for others like Jesus).

The "**duty of the moment**" – the great commandment of charity – love of God, of neighbour, and of self is a call not to remain indifferent but to allow ourselves to be moved, troubled, lifted up or cast down by others and what they are going through; just as Jesus did. As we rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep and show mercy; God fills us with his peace. As we walk in the Lord’s ways we avoid selfishness, jealousy, or feeling sorry for ourselves and trust rather in God to show us the way and provide for our needs.

**FOOD FOR THE CHRISTIAN** – as an infant on mother’s breast we feed on God hour by hour, day by day

### **PRACTISING THE PRESENCE OF GOD & RECONCILIATION – ANTIDOTE TO BOREDOM**

As we “keep God’s company”, learning day by day to live in a free exchange of mind and heart with the Holy Trinity, we can enter into a sleep that remains contemplative all night long. We needn’t worry about how this works but simply trust in the Holy Trinity to sustain us in a life of communion with them and with everyone else in the communion of saints, with everyone on Earth, in purgatory, and in heaven.

Jesus of Nazareth called the Christ, the Lord, revealed for all time to humanity that 3 divine Persons together are the one and only divine being we call God and are ever present. The only place in the universe, in all of creation, where they can be absent is in the human soul when an individual turns away from God and delves into sin, any refusal of the divine will, denial of love and its demands, or thought, word, act, or behaviour that is evil, an offence against God, others, the goodness of creation, or life itself.

Serious sins are various forms of selfishness that use other people as objects and deny or denigrate the other's goodness and dignity created by God, simultaneously debasing and estranging the sinner from peace and the communion of God's love. We are constantly in need of seeking forgiveness, reconciliation, and conversion from God through confession.

Avoid being bored by taking interest in others rather than waiting for someone else to make things happen. Dispel the impulse to escape the present and run after any number of things. Draw on your inner freedom and deliberately spend time and invest energy and interest in others, in God, in what you are doing. Participate as fully and as often as you can in the words and rituals of the Holy Eucharist and every other Liturgy and prayer as gifts from the Holy Spirit to draw us to the Father through Jesus. Much grace comes to us through God's inspired **Psalms** / prayers in the Bible: e.g. **Psalm 112** – “The happiness of the just man.”