

The Good News

outside of us until we make a response to this good news. For example, imagine a dating couple. Toward the end of a nice evening, the man gets down on one knee and says something romantic ending with, "... I want to spend my life with you. Will you marry me?" Imagine the lady responds, "Wow! This is such good news." And then, filled with joy, she walks away. Weird, right? Yet, so often the message of God's good news is proclaimed but no response is given. We must make a choice. God is like that man down on one knee waiting patiently, hoping beyond hope that you will say "yes" and give him your whole heart.

Scripture speaks of at least three ways that we can positively respond to God's good news:

A. Repent — In order to receive the good news, we have to first break free from the bad news, namely sin. We need to examine ourselves honestly and humbly come before God, acknowledging our weakness and disobedience. A Catholic will experience great freedom when he or she goes to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As frightening as it may be at first, this sacrament is a wonderful place to encounter Jesus' mercy. Countless people feel so much better, even lighter, after confessing their sins to Jesus through a priest.

B. Believe — Here we proclaim our faith in God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must acknowledge his saving action in our lives and choose to put him in charge, at the very center of our hearts. At its essence, this is about deciding to "surrender" ourselves completely to God. He respects your freedom and would never force himself upon you. God is waiting for you to open wide the doors of your heart to him and to give him permission so he can transform your life.

C. Be Baptized — Baptism is the normal way that a person begins life as a disciple (cf. Matthew 28:19). It is possible that you can be a follower of Jesus, though you might not yet be baptized. If that is the case, it's strongly recommended that you learn more about baptism by speaking to a Catholic priest or another committed Catholic. It is also possible that you were baptized as an infant but have never had the chance, as an adult, to ratify the decision that your parents made for you. Perhaps you would like to freely choose that now?

The following is a short prayer that provides words for you to make a heartfelt response to God. Anyone can pray this whether baptized or unbaptized. Read it over first and take the time to decide if this is truly how you desire to respond. It also helps if you have a friend, who is already living as a disciple, who can pray for you and with you as you make this response to God. When you are ready, pray it slowly and out loud. Pause for a moment of silence at the end of each of the 3 sections to let it really sink in:

God our Father, I believe that out of your infinite love you have created me. In a thousand ways I have shunned your love. I repent of each and every one of my sins. Please forgive me.

Thank you for sending your Son to die for me, to save me from eternal death. I choose this day to enter into (renew my) covenant with you and to place Jesus at the center of my heart. I surrender to him as Lord over my whole life.

I ask you now to flood my soul with the gift of the Holy Spirit so that my life may be transformed. Give me the grace and courage to live as a disciple in your Church for the rest of my days. Amen.

What Now?

If you chose to respond to God with this prayer, believe that he has heard you. Just like exchanging wedding vows is only the beginning of a lifelong marriage, so too, this is just the start of a relationship that God wants to have with you, one that is meant to continue for all of eternity. Again, like a marriage, there will be tough times. Persevere to the end!

It's so important to surround yourself with community (namely a vibrant Catholic parish) that can help foster this relationship. You may also wish to visit the following website for more help: www.stpaulse.com/ibelieve.

In addition to this, one of the best ways to really own this message is to share it with someone else, someone you love, someone who really needs to hear good news. Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord!

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Good News

All of us—no matter our age, race, gender, education, or the size of our bank account—carry in our hearts some very big and very basic questions about life: Who am I? Why am I here? Why is there a world in the first place? Who is God? What difference does all of this make? Is it possible to find true love or true fulfillment? What happens when we die?

You don't have to go through life thinking that it's impossible to find adequate answers to these questions. The following is a simple explanation of what is referred to as the "good news"—that God is a God of love who yearns to reveal not only answers to you, but himself, personally. Ultimately, he is inviting you to the most satisfying life—friendship with him.

1) God the Father *Created us out of love*

Who are we and why are we here? Scripture tells us our core identity: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:1). It's worth stopping here. Read this scripture a few times and reflect on what it means for you.

The Creator of the universe lovingly made you—your individual human soul—from nothing. Furthermore, you were made in the image and likeness of a Supernatural Being who is infinite, eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good (cf. Genesis 1:26). Make sense? That's why it isn't enough for you merely to know a few concepts, to travel to a few places, and to rack up a few "life experiences." Deep within you is a desire to know everything, to go everywhere, to experience all that there is. Deep within us is the longing to be united with our Creator forever.

1B) Sin & Death *A problem we can't fix*

Sadly, the "bad news" is that instead of striving for this Infinite Father, we often settle for things that are finite. What's worse is we may subconsciously treat them as if they were infinite (e.g., expecting a finite human relationship to offer eternal bliss). Whenever we prioritize ourselves or the people or things in our lives above God, we offend him. We call this sin. This misplaced worship escalates quickly, and so it's not hard to see the effects of sin in our world today: war, starvation, racism, poverty, rape, the spread of STDs, etc.

That being said, many of us do not feel that we have committed sin, or we feel that our sins are really not that big of a deal (especially in comparison to other "bad" people). If we could chart our morality on a bell curve,

the "Mother Teresas" of the world would be at one end of the curve, and the serial killers would be at the other end. Most of us would see ourselves as being somewhere in the middle (not perfect, but not all that bad either). By analogy, if you had a terminal illness and were living in a hospital, you might say, "Well, I'm certainly not as sick as some of the other people here." The reality is that, whether we realize it or not, we have all been infected by the sin-virus! And all sin carries with it a consequence: death! "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). In other words, our paycheck at the end of the day for our sinful work is that we will die—not just physically, but eternally. Sorry if this sounds morbid, but none of us can escape death.

Though we were hard-wired with a longing for the infinite, we have altered our destiny and have condemned ourselves to spend eternity with what is finite. It has been said, "God is so loving that when you die he will give you whatever you want forever! Unfortunately, if what you want is anything *less* than God, it will feel like hell." Ponder that for a moment. The point here is not to scare you into belief but to acknowledge that sin and death are real—and that humans are incapable of fixing either.

2) God the Son *Died to forgive us*

In the Old Testament of the Bible, God's people were enslaved in Egypt for more than 400 years. God used Moses, as mediator, to eventually rescue his people. As part of the plan for freedom, each household was instructed to sacrifice a baby sheep. Sounds crude, right? If our sin (a kind of interior slavery) leads to death, then something has to die. Right from the beginning, when humans offended God, they needed to find a way to make atonement (repair the wrong). Instead of giving up his or her own life, a lamb acted as substitute for the sinful person—life for life. Year after year the people tried to "get right" with God by offering these finite animal sacrifices.

However, the infinite problem of sin still had no permanent solution. So God the Father sent his beloved Son from heaven to earth to become man. One day, when Jesus was beginning his public ministry, he was walking by the Jordan River. John the Baptist pointed him out with this prophetic title: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)! In other words, he was telling everyone that Jesus would be the final "great lamb" who would die once-and-for-all to deal with the problem of sin. The Son, fully God, took on our full humanity, joining the infinite and the finite. Being a finite human, Jesus was able to represent all

fallen humans (who had created the problem), and, being infinite, he was able to completely heal the wounded relationship between human beings and God the Father.

When Jesus, the Lamb of God, died on the cross he became for us the ultimate substitute. But death did not have the last word. On the third day Jesus was resurrected to new life, victoriously conquering even death itself! Now each of us has the possibility of being forgiven of our sins AND living forever with God in eternal life. Forgiveness is free for the asking, and we are saved by Jesus' gift of love! What could be better? But the good news does not end there.

3) God the Holy Spirit *Comes to live in us*

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10)! However, he knew that for his followers to experience the fullness of this "new life" he would have to leave so that the Holy Spirit could come. (By the way, the Holy Spirit is not like "The Force." He is the third divine person of the Trinity, who wants to be in relationship with you.) Right before his departure, Jesus instructed his followers to wait for the promise of the Father. In a few days (Pentecost) they would be "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). The term baptism refers to an immersion of a person in water as a means of being filled with the Holy Spirit. That's right, God actually wants to dwell inside of you! Not only did God create you in love and die for your sins, but he wants to make of you a sacred space, so that your body literally becomes his temple (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16).

When a person is immersed in the Holy Spirit, everything changes for him or her. Imagine being near-sighted and wearing glasses for the first time. It's not that you were blind before, but things were out of focus. Suddenly, the whole world appears clear and crisp. You might exclaim, "I thought everyone saw the world a little fuzzy ... but this is the way I was always meant to see!" Receiving an out-pouring (or a renewal) of the Holy Spirit can lead to a newfound clarity about life, which is often accompanied by genuine peace and joy. A person might also experience a desire for prayer, strength in combatting old habits of sin, and a yearning to read Scripture and to learn about the ways of God. Most importantly, being filled with the Holy Spirit can help us to be focused on others, making us into much more loving people than we could ever become on our own strength.

Our Response *Good news always demands a response*

The good news of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is wonderful, but it remains



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