



# CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF OSOGBO



## Deepening the Faith:

### A Catechetical Manual

- Confirmation
- Reward and Punishment
- Basic African Values & Christian Faith

**APRIL - JUNE 2022**



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## **Deepening the Faith:** A Catechetical Manual

- Confirmation
- Reward and Punishment
- Basic African Values & Christian Faith

**APRIL - JUNE 2022**

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# FOREWORD

□ This is eternal life, that they may know you the true God, and Jesus Christ who you sent □. (John 17:3).

The question posed by the penny catechism on why God made us is answered by the verse above in a succinct way. The verse reveals the essence of our being as children of God. The knowledge of God is very essential to the Christian life, because it is the only way that anyone can enter into a personal and intimate relationship with God. This then is the reason we have embarked on the exercise of deepening the faith in order to enhance the personal contact with the only true God through Jesus Christ the word that was made flesh and dwells among us. Knowledge of Jesus is thus knowledge of God, because we cannot know the Father except through the Son, for Jesus is the one through whom God now speaks to humanity, Jesus and the Father are one in purpose and one in truth; one in life and one in Spirit. (Jn 10:30).

My dear people of God, this is the purpose for the exercise of deepening the faith. It is geared towards drawing people closer to God. Active participation in the program should draw us closer to God and gain eternal life for us. We must continue our longing to know God and to know Christ whom he has sent because both are part of the reality of eternal life. There can be no eternal life apart from the presence of God and His Son, Jesus Christ who is the propitiation for our sins (1Jn. 2:2). Therefore, this is another opportunity for us all as Christians and even more as Catholics to take further steps in deepening our faith and increasing our knowledge on the essence of our lives which is to know Him the true God and by that gain eternal life.

I thank all of you for your interest in this program and doing your best to get actively involved. I encourage those who have not been active in the exercise to wake up and join the faithful who participate in the spiritual exercise weekly. Most importantly, I admonish you all to use this opportunity to your advantage. Learn more about God and get to know Him more intimately. Let your knowledge of God bring forth love for Him in your hearts and as you love Him, serve Him with all your being. May God bless you all.

Happy New Year 2022

**Most Rev. John Oyejola**

*Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Osogbo*

*30/11/2021*

*Feast of St Andrew the Apostle*

# PREFACE

The response of the members and their active participation in the Deepening the Faith programme has been a source of strength and encouragement for us in these past years.

Many of the topics that will be treated this year will be new and therefore we are all expected to participate actively for us to understand our faith in a new way. As usual, the program remains a weekly activity preferably done every-Sunday. We therefore encourage all parishioners to continue to make it a one-hour program before or after Mass in small groups for better participation.

The Bishop and Catechetical commission members are grateful to our instructors for their commitment as new members are joining us. We also thank all the priests for their relentless support to this Department. May God bless and reward you abundantly. Amen.

In this fifth year of Deepening the faith programme in Osogbo Diocese, we continue to put all the materials of the Directorate in our website: <[www.osogbodiocesandre.org](http://www.osogbodiocesandre.org)>; and also providing opportunities to contact us by email [info@osogbodiocesandre.org](mailto:info@osogbodiocesandre.org) or [osogbodiocesandre@gmail.com](mailto:osogbodiocesandre@gmail.com). Kindly make use of this opportunity on a regular basis and benefit from the exchanged interactions when necessary especially on any pressing issue on matters of faith. We assure you always of our keenness to serve you!

Welcome again to year 2022, a year of abundant blessings!

**Sr Dr Immaculata Olu Omojola, SSMA**

Director, Religious Education

Catholic Diocese of Osogbo

02/12/2021

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## APRIL

**FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT    DATE: 03/04/2022**

**THEME FOR THE MONTH:  
CONFIRMATION**

**THEME FOR THE WEEK:  
CONFIRMATION AND OTHER SACRAMENTS  
OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION**

**Biblical References:** Acts 8: 14-17, Acts 19:1-6, Luke 4:18, Isaiah 61:1, Acts 10 :38, I Jn 2: 20-27, 2 Cor. 1: 20-21 and Eph 4: 30.

Baptism, the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the " Sacraments of Christian Initiation" whose unity must be safeguarded. Every faithful must know and be aware of the fact that the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace; for by the Sacrament of Confirmation, the baptized are more perfectly bound to the church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence, they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by their words and deeds.

From the above, Confirmation confers on a baptized person, to make him/ her a strong and perfect Christian and a soldier of Jesus Christ. This shows that each baptized Christian is already the temple of the Holy Spirit, but that the Sacrament of Confirmation makes the baptized person an adult in faith, mind, heart, words and deeds. Confirmation is to baptism what growth is to birth. Now it is clear that a man cannot advance to a perfect age unless he/she has first been born; in like manner, unless he/ she has first been baptized he / she cannot receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. Confirmation is therefore known as the Sacrament of the Seal or Sacrament of Imposition of Hands.

In the early age of the church, (as it is still, today), Confirmation

was part of the rite of initiation, and consequently was administered immediately after Baptism. When Infant Baptism became customary, Confirmation was not administered until the child had attained the age of reasoning. That is the present practice till today. However, in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult, Confirmation is conferred on the person immediately after Baptism (with the express permission of the Bishop, if he is not the Minister of the Sacrament). In the Old Testament, the prophet announced that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the hopeful for Messiah for His saving mission (Isaiah 11 :2, 61:1, LK. 4:16-22). The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at His baptism by John was the sign that this was He who was to come, the Messiah, the son of God (Mt 3: 13-17, Jn1:33-34). He was conceived of the Holy Spirit; His whole life and His whole mission are carried out in total communion with the Holy Spirit whom the Father gives Him "without measure" (Jn 3:34). This fullness of the spirit was not to remain uniquely the Messiah's, but was to be communicated to the whole messianic people (Ezek. 36: 25-27).

At several occasions Christ promised this outpouring of the spirit, a promise which He fulfilled first on Easter Sunday and then more strikingly on Pentecost. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the Apostles began to proclaim the mighty works of God, and Peter declared this outpouring of the spirit to be the sign of the messianic age. Those who believed in the apostolic preaching and were baptized and received the gift of the Holy Spirit in their turn. (Acts 2:38).

### **Questions to Ponder:**

What do you understand by "being baptised in the Holy Spirit"

For whom is "the fullness of the Holy Spirit" meant

**Task:** Learn more about the Holy Spirit in the Bible



**PASSION SUNDAY DATE: 10/04/2022**

**THEME FOR THE MONTH:  
CONFIRMATION**

**THEME FOR THE WEEK:  
REQUIREMENTS FOR CONFIRMATION**

**Biblical References:** (Wis 4:8), Acts 2:36-41, 16:27-33, Joel 2:28-29)

Every catholic-baptized person not yet confirmed can and should receive the sacrament of confirmation. Since Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist form a unity, it follows that the faithful are obliged to receive the Sacrament at the appropriate time (Canon 890). Many a time people talk and are confused about the age of reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation. Age of the body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood man can attain spiritual maturity as the book of wisdom says " For old age is not honoured for length of time, or measured by number of years" (Wis 4:8). Many children, through the strength of the Holy Spirit they have received, have bravely fought for Christ even to the shedding of their blood.

Apart from the above, the following are required for proper reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation:

State of Grace

Ready knowledge of Christian Faith and Doctrine

Reception of the Sacrament of Penance

Sense of belonging to the church

Prayerful life

Spiritual help of sponsors (who themselves have been confirmed, and must not be father or mother of the candidate).

**Questions to Ponder:**

1. Can children receive the Holy Spirit or be confirmed
2. Can you mention, in your own view, the three most

basic conditions for confirmation in descending order of strength□

**Task:** If you have not been confirmed, endeavour to satisfy the requirements

## **EASTER SUNDAY DATE: 17/04/2022**

### **THEME FOR THE MONTH: CONFIRMATION**

### **THEME FOR THE WEEK: EFFECTS OF CONFIRMATION**

**Biblical References:** Wis 4:8, Rom 8:14-15, Lk 24: 48-49, Acts 2:4-15, Jn 3:8, 14:26, 16:13

It is evident from the celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace. It roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry "Abba! Father! (Rom 8:15)

It unites us more firmly to Christ

It increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us.

It renders our bond with the church more perfect.

It gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess, the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the cross.

Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once, for it too imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual mark, the

character which is the sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of His spirit by clothing him/ her with power from on high so that he/she may be His witness (Lk 24: 48-49)

It gives power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially.

It makes the Catholic party / parties properly ready to be admitted into Marriage (Canon 1065).

We must always remember what St. Ambrose said about Confirmation when we are talking about the effects of the Sacrament and Confirmation: □ Recall then that you have received the spiritual seed, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment, and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God's presence. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with His sign: Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed His pledge, the spirit, in your hearts.

### **Questions to Ponder:**

What is the most glaring vocal manifestation or evidence of Holy Spirit Baptism □

Mention two other spiritual benefits of confirmation

**Task:** Take action to manifest the effects of the Holy Spirit in your life.

**SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER DATE: 24/04/2022**

**THEME FOR THE MONTH:  
CONFIRMATION**

**THEME FOR THE WEEK:  
CONFIRMATION AND CHARISMS**

**Biblical References:** Rom 8:15, Lk 24: 48-49, 1Cor. 12:7-11, 28, Acts 1:8

From the words of St Ambrose, which flowed from the scriptures; we have the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit-Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of God. All the above gifts make a Christian perfect. There are gifts and there are Charisms of the Holy Spirit. The primary distinction between the charisms and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit is that the Charisms are gifts given for the common good, or for the service of others; the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, are given primarily for the purpose of personal sanctification. From the biblical point of view the following are the Charisms of the Holy Spirit:

"Truly there are diverse graces but the same spirit. And there are diverse ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diverse works, but the same God, who works everything in everyone. However, the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one toward what is beneficial, certainly, to one, through the spirit is given words of wisdom, but to another according to the same spirit, words of knowledge; to another, in the same spirit, faith; to another, in the one spirit, the gift of healing; to another, miraculous works, to another prophecy; to another, the discernment of spirits; to another, the interpretation of words" 1 Cor.12: 4-10.

It must be said here that Charisms mentioned above can also be seen to be simplified by St. Paul in the same letter: "And indeed, God has established a certain order in the church: first Apostles, second Prophets, third Teachers, next miracle-workers, and then the grace

of healing, of helping others, of governing, of different kinds of languages, and Spirit of the interpretation of words" (1 Cor. 12:28). Without the Holy Spirit each and every one of us cannot be imparted with the above-mentioned Charisms, and Christian life in the world would be meaningless or impossible.

**Questions to Ponder:**

Which of the gifts of the Holy Spirit have you ever manifested   
What do you understand by "he who speaks in tongues does not speak to men but to God (1 Cor. 14:2)"

**Task:** Pray for your choice of the Holy Spirit gifts

## MAY

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER    DATE: 01/05/2022

**THEME FOR THE MONTH:  
REWARD AND PUNISHMENT**

**THEME FOR THE WEEK:  
THE CONCEPT OF CHOICE-MAKING**

**Biblical References:** Galatians 5:1; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Isaiah 61:1; Joshua 24:15, Galatians 3:15; Deuteronomy 30:17-20; John 14:15; Galatians 6:7-8

Fundamentally, the doctrine of reward and punishment is central to Judaism down the ages. In Christianity, the belief that man receives his just reward for his good deeds and just retribution for his transgressions is the very basis of the concepts of both human and divine justice (Cf. Proverbs 10:16-26; Matthew 25:46; psalm37:34) and it is with the latter that this article deals. The doctrine of reward and punishment is incorporated in every classical enumeration of the fundamental principles of Judaism. We shall therefore, gradually expose this topic under the following headings:

### **The concept of choice-making**

From the very beginning, man had a special place in the creation plan of God. □Let us make man in our own image and likeness" (Gen. 1:26-28). Therefore, man is different from all other creatures of God. In the light of faith, we know *who we are*. We are the only creatures made □in the image of God□ (Genesis 1:27), the □only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake□ (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 24). Through faith, we know that God created man □as an intelligent and free being□ and that, over and above this, man is called to relate intimately with God and to share in his happiness

(*Gaudium et spes*, no. 21). We know, in other words, that we are not only unique among earthly beings in our dignity as persons made in God's image and likeness, but also unique among earthly beings. Indeed, as the Fathers of Vatican Council II have reminded us, □ it is only in the mystery of the Word-made-flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear - Christ the new Adam.

### **Freedom of choice-making**

In pressing further, one Special gift which we received as being special creatures of God is the ability to make choices through freedom (Galatians 5:1; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Isaiah 61:1). Hence, it is often said that not to make a choice is, in itself, a choice-making. Every day of our lives, in things we do, especially when we engage in any serious endeavor in life, we often need to make choices. These choices may lead to success or failure. We are therefore often advised in our fundamental option to make the right choices that will give us success rather than failure (Joshua 24:15).

### **God-given self-dignity**

The dignity is such that we are called to be as intelligent and free persons, capable of determining our own lives by our own free will and choices. This is the dignity that we *ascribe to ourselves* through the help of God's never-failing grace by freely opting to shape our choices and actions in accordance with the truth. In other words, we covet to ourselves this dignity, and inwardly participating in it by making better moral choices, and such choices are, in turn, to be dependent upon true moral judgments in all occasions and circumstances. The nature of this dignity of making the better and right choices has been beautifully developed by the Fathers of Vatican Council II and by Pope John Paul II, particularly, in his encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, where he avers that it is imperative in making true moral judgments and good moral choices if we truly

respect our God-given dignity and participate in the dignity to which we are called as intelligent and free-will persons.

### **Perception of *practical truth***

Again, in a document hailed by almost everyone as one of the most important of the entire Council, namely, the Declaration on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis humanae*), the Council Fathers declared that the highest norm of human life is the divine law, eternal, objective, and universal, whereby God orders, directs, and governs the entire universe and all the ways of the human community according to a plan conceived in wisdom and in love. □ (Cf. Romans 8:28). Immediately after affirming this truth, the Council Fathers went on to say: □ Man has been made by God to participate in this law, with the result that, under the gentle disposition of divine providence, he can come to perceive, ever-increasingly, the unchanging truth □ (no. 3). The document also stresses that, because man can come to perceive ever-increasingly, the unchanging truth, he has the duty, to seek the truth. The truth in question here is evidently not a contemplative or speculative truth but a truth that is to shape and guide human choices and actions, i.e., a *practical truth*.

### **Questions to Ponder:**

1. Give examples of life situations when we can encounter choice-making difficulties □
2. Do you often remember to pray before making choices □ why or why not □

**Task:** Plan to pray always prior to making choices



**FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER DATE: 08/05/2022**

**THEME FOR THE MONTH:  
REWARD AND PUNISHMENT**

**THEME FOR THE WEEK:**

**THE ROLE OF CONSCIENCE IN CHOICE- MAKING**

**Biblical References:** Hebrews 9:14; James 4:17; Hebrews 10:22; Romans 2:14-15 and Romans 13:5

When we talk of choice making, the inevitable role of conscience comes into play, because consciences help us in making choices either good or bad. The role of conscience in helping us to know the □unchanging truth□ of God's divine and eternal law and its "imperatives" is developed in another document of the Council, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*). There, we find the following important passage: Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. The voice of this law, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells him inwardly at the right moment, do this because it is good and shun that because it is bad. For man has in his heart a law written by God. His dignity lies in observing this law, and by it, he will be judged. Man's conscience is his most secret core, and his sanctuary. (Cf. Hebrews 9:14; James 4:17)

Man's conscience is where he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths. Conscience can indeed err □through invincible ignorance without losing its dignity□ (so long as there is sufficient □care for the search for the truth and for the good□); but □to the extent that a correct conscience holds sway, persons and groups to turn away from blind choice and seek to conform to the objective norms of morality□. Paul says that when we do wrong, we injure our conscience and yet, we also sin against God (1 Corinthians 8:12, 1 Jn 5:17).

Furthermore, according to Vatican Council II, good conscience is

the second kind of dignity, proper to human persons. This dignity is acquired by diligently seeking the truth about what we are to do if we are to be fully the beings we are meant to be and by shaping our lives freely in accordance with the truth. According to the Vatican Council II, the human person has the capacity of inwardly participating in God's divine and eternal law - the highest norm of human life. It maintains that this capacity of human persons is related to their conscience, for it is through the mediation of conscience that human persons come to know ever increasingly the imperatives of God's law. Thus, through the Holy Spirit, it helps form our conscience (Romans 9:10)

A central truth of Christian revelation is that human persons, created in the image and likeness of God, have the power of free choice. In order to create a being to whom he could give his own life, God created persons (angelic and human) who have the power to make or break their own lives by their own free choices. Persons are of themselves, *sui iuris*, i.e., in their own power or dominion. Their choices and actions belong to them and to which they are answerable, not the choices and actions of others. If God's offer of his own life and friendship is to be a gift, it must be freely received; it cannot be forced on another or settled by anything other than the free choices of the one who gives and the one who receives. The application of Human Dignity, Free Human Action, Virtue, and Conscience is self-determined.

The truth that human persons have the capacity to determine their own lives through their own free choices is in the realm of Catholic faith. It is central to the Scriptures, according to the book of Sirach 15:11-20 and as cited by the Fathers of Vatican II in *Gaudium et spes*. This idea of choice-making will invariably relate to personal freedom and accrued responsibility.

### **Questions to Ponder:**

1. Conscience speaks like God speaks into our hearts True or false

2. If false, how can you differentiate
3. As a matter of fact, do you regularly examine your conscience prior to making choices

**Task:** Always exploit the facilities of your God-given conscience in all choice-making opportunities.

**FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER DATE: 15/05/2022**

**THEME FOR THE MONTH:  
REWARD AND PUNISHMENT**

**THEME FOR THE WEEK:  
FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY**

**Biblical References:** Matthew 25:14-30; Galatians 3:15 and Deuteronomy 30:11-15; 19

It is part of the human nature to be free and be given his or her space. No one likes to be compelled or forced to do something; hence we hear people often say I need my space. They invariably mean I need freedom. Yes, this is part of the human nature. God, from the very beginning, created man to be free and able to do whatever he likes. God did not create man like robots so that he had a control button or panel to determine what actions he should carry out or not. Even in our everyday society, man can do whatever he wishes, hence we often hear people say: it is my life; and I can do whatever I want to do with it; it's nobody's business. Yes, truly it's nobody's business, this is the freedom which we enjoy as human beings.

From Genesis however, we read about how God said to our first parents you are free to eat of any of the tree in the garden (Gen 2:16). However many a time we forget that there is a corresponding factor to freedom. Freedom is not just one sided. There is another dimension to freedom which is hardly talked about and that's responsibility resulting from your choice-usage

of freedom.

Freedom and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. One cannot be experienced without the other. There is some misunderstanding and confusion in relation to these terms. It is important to define them properly. Some people define freedom as freedom from - commitment, challenge, suffering, having to earn a living and so on. We also define freedom as the ability to do what we want. These definitions are vague and off the mark. It is this vague idea that led one of the greatest French Philosophers of all time, Jean Jacque Rousseau who said that "man is free but everywhere in chains". This simply means that man, though he is free to do whatever he wants, he is by all means, bound by certain factors that prevent him from carrying out certain actions. Thus, for every action, there is a corresponding consequence which one must accept, since the action (s) was freely carried out. The parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30 gives us a clear illustration of how our freedom has a consequential effect.

Genuine freedom is our ability to choose at any moment the most beneficial action or direction for ourself. This is not easily accomplished. It requires a keen sense of self-awareness. Without self-awareness, it is unlikely that you would have any idea of who you are and what is most beneficial for you. In order to maintain self-awareness the individuals need to cultivate a sense of responsibility. Not to others but to themselves. Responsibility is not accountability. What it means in a practical manner is the ability to accept all the effects of your choices and their consequential outcomes without blaming the circumstances surrounding your life, or other people, genetics, the weather, the government, God, or luck, etc.

The amount of freedom that we experience in our daily lives will be a direct outcome of the degree of responsibility we express. You cannot have one without the other. There certainly aren't any shortcuts. Some people may find this overwhelming and will hand

over their freedom in exchange for little or no responsibility. In simple terms, freedom *with* responsibility, is like a car *with* its steering wheel. The car is the freedom and the steering wheel is the responsibility. If you have freedom (the car) but no responsibility (the steering wheel), it is dangerous. It will create a mess (imagine driving a car without a steering wheel). Similarly, if you have responsibility (the steering wheel) but no freedom (the car), it is useless. Having said this, we can consider the Church's teaching on freedom and responsibility and how it pertains to our discussion. However, human freedom does not legitimate bad moral choices, nor does it justify a stance that all moral choices are good if they are free: "The exercise of freedom does not imply a right to say or do everything." (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1740). Christian belief in human freedom recognizes that we are called but not compelled by God to choose constantly the values of the Gospel—faith, hope, love, mercy, justice, forgiveness, integrity and compassion. Just as the penny Catechism puts it that God has therefore created us in freedom and given us the gift of freedom for us to know him, love him, and serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in the next. However, we too are so free to either do this or do otherwise, but then whatever choice we take in our freedom, there is a corresponding consequence. This was the consequence that befell our first parents in the Garden of Eden when out of their freedom they decided to go otherwise along the *Serpent's* way.

### **Questions to Ponder:**

1. What is the role of "will-power" when faced with temptation
2. How should we disburse our God-given talents?

**Task:** Let the thought of the consequences determine your use of freedom

**SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER    DATE: 22/05/2022**  
**THEME FOR THE MONTH:**  
**REWARD AND PUNISHMENT**

**THEME FOR THE WEEK:**  
**SIN AS AN ABUSE OF FREEDOM**

**Biblical References:** Genesis 3:3, Romans 6:18, 8:2; Galatians 5:13

Prov. 9:17-18; Prov. 14:12

From the discourse thus far, we have established that man was created to have freedom and have the ability to make a choice. He is free to choose to do whatever appeals most to him. However, he is encouraged to choose that which will give him life and not lead to his destruction. This was the case in the Garden of Eden. The imperative was clear □ you are free to eat of any tree of the garden, but of the tree of the fruit of knowledge thou shall not eat, if thou eat, thou shall die □ (Genesis 3:3). Man was not forced; it was an instruction that was given. He would have decided not to eat but on the contrary in his freedom, he ate and was condemned, which was the fall of man, resulting from Man □s sin of disobedience. (Genesis 3)

Throughout the history of the Israelites, the people of Israel entered into a covenant with God, in their freedom, they decided to be God □s people and Yahweh being their God. They were to keep the ordinances of the Lord, they were free to either obey the precepts of Yahweh or do follow the gods of the nations around them. This is what Joshua made clear to them just before they were about to enter the Promised Land. □ And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the

gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Josh. 24: 15).

Of course, time and again, we see how the Israelites would disobey God to find themselves in slavery until they were delivered again by God's loving power. From all of these experiences, it is clear that whenever we fall into sin, we become slaves and in slavery there is a lack of freedom. God created us free, he wants us to remain free, but when out of our free choice which he blessed us with and we decide to turn away from him, we make ourselves slaves to sin and hence we punish ourselves. St. Paul tells us clearly in Galatians 5:13, "for you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love, serves one another". Sin therefore is an abuse of freedom that God has given to us. God made us to be free but when in our freedom we transgress, we bring untold punishment upon ourselves.

St Paul devoted a great deal of his time in Galatians chapter 5 to explain human freedom. Paul wants Christians to realize that they are free in Christ. We often think of this as freedom from something—the removal of restraints. However, Christian freedom is also freedom to something. We have been set free from the curse and burden of keeping the Law, and we have been set free to live for the glory of God (Romans 6:18; 8:2). Our Freedom is not a license to sin; as that will amount to an abuse of God's grace. We were created to live for the glory of God. However, due to the fall of our first parents (Adam and Eve—Adam and Eve), we have been slaves to sin ever since the rebellion in the Garden of Eden. We were powerless to fix this on our own, so God sovereignty intervened. Now at salvation, the debt Jesus paid to ransom us from our sin is applied, and we became set-free to live as we were originally designed by God. Though, this won't be perfectly

realized until we are glorified with God after death. We are free not to sin!

**Questions to Ponder:**

1. Comment on "every wrong doing is a sin"□.. 1 Jn. 5:17
2. God gave man the free-will to sin or not to sin. Why do you think so□

**Task:** Train yourself to use your free-will to reject sin always

**SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER DATE: 29/05/2022**

**THEME FOR THE MONTH:  
REWARD AND PUNISHMENT**

**THEME FOR THE WEEK:  
REWARD AND PUNISHMENT**

**Biblical References: Deuteronomy 11:13-21: 26-32; Luke 14:13-14; Lev. 27:1; Romans 2:6-16; Luke 19:11-12; Matthew 10:14-15; Matthew 11:23-24; Matthew 25:34-36; Matthew 25:41-46**

When we talk of reward and punishment from the Jewish scriptures down to Christianity. It is regarded as axiomatic that God rewards the righteous by granting them prosperity and well-being and punishes the wicked with destruction. It is the basis of the second paragraph of the *Shema* (Deut. 11:13□21): adherence to God's commandments will bring □the rain of the land in its seasons□; disobedience will cause Him □to shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and the land will not yield her fruit.□ It is the subject of the two dire comminations in the Bible (Lev. 23 and Deut. 28). The reward of honoring one's parents will be "that your days may be long upon the earth which the Lord thy God giveth thee□ (Ex.



20:12). The seeming prosperity of the wicked is fleeting; in the end he will be utterly destroyed (Ps. 92:8).

□ So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today □ to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul □ then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and olive oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. □ (Deuteronomy 11:13-15)

"See, I am setting before you today a blessing □ the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. When the Lord your God has brought you into the land you are entering to possess, you are to proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses. As you know, these mountains are across the Jordan, westward, toward the setting sun, near the great trees of Moreh, in the territory of those Canaanites living in the Arabah in the vicinity of Gilgal. You are about to cross the Jordan to enter and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you. When you have taken it over and are living there, be sure that you obey all the decrees and laws I am setting before you today" (Deuteronomy 11:26-32)

In the New Testament, St. Paul explains the fourth commandment further saying Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. □ Honor your father and mother □ □ which is the first commandment with a promise □ <sup>3</sup> □ so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. □ it therefore invariably mean that when children do not obey their parents they will receive the punishment of things not going well for them. From these passages it is clear enough that when we do God □ s will he rewards us by blessing us with good things and when we do

otherwise, we are punished.

Be that as it may, we see a different turn of events in the drama in Job's life. Job was a just man who obeyed God and lived a righteous life, he served God faithfully but at the end, God allowed him to suffer greatly as if he was under some kind of punishment. In fact, God even asked Satan if he had considered "my servant Job" □ For God to call Job his servant, it is very clear that he was a good man but at the end of the day, it was as if he was neglected (cf. Job 1:23). Little wonder that Job complained □ why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power □ □ (Job 21:7). Jeremiah had similar experience while he was a faithful servant of God but the wicked planned to kill him and he asked God "You are always righteous, LORD, when I bring a case before you. Yet, I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper □ Why do all the faithless live at ease □"

Sometimes, good people may suffer not as a result for punishment for sins but as correction. The Letter to the Hebrews explains this in greater depth. Sometimes, it says, bad things that happen to us are a result of God's discipline. They are not retribution or a punishment for sin; rather, they are a correction, as a parent would correct a child. They are not intended to break down, but rather to increase holiness in the believer (Hebrews 12:10).

However, at the end of the story we were told that Job's fortune was restored more than ever before at the end of the day. Hence in the final analysis God never neglects his own. It is clear that God will reward those who obey him, it is natural to do so. It should however be stated that God's reward for those who obey him will come at the end of time, when they enjoy the beatific vision. *"But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil (Luke 6:35).*

It therefore explains why the righteous may suffer for a while on earth but yet be sure of eternal reward so long as they remain obedient to God's will. This is what Peter Wojuaye calls the □Final Deo Gratias□ i.e the final Thank you, when God will say thank you by rewarding all who have obeyed him. "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid [rewarded] at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:13-14)

But God is a God of mercy; how then will God punish those who will disobey him, his own creatures whom he loves so much□How can we reconcile this□

**Yes we can say that God is a God of mercy. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked and often delays His judgments in the hope of repentance.**

Look at it from God's perspective. He has already determined to give all human beings every possible opportunity to choose life. What would you do with a person who□whether willfully or through continual neglect□rejects God's gracious offer of eternal life and deliberately chooses the devil's way□Would you give such a person eternal life in your kingdom, where he could continue to harm others indefinitely□What option would you choose□

Certainly some people picture God as a monster who punishes failed human beings in hellfire for eternity. Yet when we carefully and prayerfully examine the relevant scriptural passages□coupled with an understanding of God's true purpose for mankind□that is not the punishment of the wicked.

**Is God also a God of justice in the sense that He will punish those who deliberately refuse to repent of their wickedness and wrongdoing?**

*"Then He will say to those on his left hand, 'Depart from Me, you*

*cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels' "* (Matthew 25:41)

*"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:46).* The wicked suffer everlasting punishment in the sense that they are forever cut off from God. Never forget that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life (Romans 6:23)

Above all, God is a God of mercy (read Psalm 136). He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked and often delays His judgments in the hope of repentance. As the apostle Peter explains: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering towards us, *not willing that any should perish but all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9). Again, the apostle Paul expresses the same godly hope. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, *who desires all men [all people] to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Timothy 2:3-4)

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, we see that God has blessed us with the choice to be free. In our freedom, God has placed before us life and death. He did all in His power to save us from sin and death that is why he sent His son Jesus Christ to redeem us. However, he will not force us to accept him but he wants us to come to him lovingly on our own free will. To this end he blesses and rewards all who come to him and do this will. This does not mean that those who do God's will may not suffer at all, sometimes they suffer for various purposes not for punishment for sin. However for those who freely decide not to choose God and abandon his ways, suffer punishment not as punishment inflicted on them by God, because God is a merciful God, but as a just God having giving us freedom, the action of those who do evil have deserved punishment for themselves. Hence

reward or punishment at the end of times simply connotes the corresponding consequences of our actions either good or bad, we must therefore choose God and have life at the end of the day. As Robert Cardinal Sarah puts it, for our own good, we must make the fundamental choice of GOD OR NOTHING.

**Questions to Ponder:**

1. Can you comment on "the wages of sin is death" □ □ Rom. 6:23
2. Does "reward and punishment" correspond to "man reaps what he sows" □....Gal 6:7. Justify your answer

**Task:** Struggle to do good always □.Isa 1:17

## **JUNE**

**PENTECOST SUNDAY (SOLEMNITY) DATE: 05/06/2022**

**THEME FOR THE MONTH:**

**BASIC AFRICAN VALUES AND CHRISTIAN FAITH**

**THEME FOR THE WEEK:**

**JESUS OF CULTURE: THE INCARNATION**

**Biblical References:** Matt 1:1-17, Matt 23:25-28

In his book, *Ozovehe*, Fr. George Ehusani posited that to be an authentic Christian as an African, we need be authentic Africans! This assertion presents us with the assumption that God who created us as persons, wants to meet us as complete persons, such that no one looks at himself as a subordinate creature to another. In the same line, we must come to realize that in every culture there are positive and negative values, such that in the positive values, we come to meet the God of culture, whose self-manifestation in Jesus Christ is made real in his encounter with human culture and tradition. It thus will be a great mistake for anyone to outrightly condemn his own country or people in acceptance of that which is completely alien to him. In like manner, we need to understand that not the entirety of a culture could be assumed, knowing fully well that there are parts of culture which stand against the conception of what it is that the Gospel calls us to be. As a mark of basic distinction that what our Christian life abhors in culture are those aspects that negate life and those that fail to give the glory due to God unto him. Outside of these aforementioned, every culture is filled with positive values that encourage our Christian life. This month, our focus in our deepening the Faith program is to search into our culture and bring out those positive values which help in strengthening our faith in Jesus Christ and also serve as pointers to those who need to encounter Jesus in and through us. In other words, our journey this month is with the aim of encountering the God of Culture.

## **Jesus of Culture: The Incarnation**

The first chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew tells us amongst other things that the historical Jesus came through a human family and generation. This account tells the reality of Jesus being born within a culture and living within the reality of that culture. The whole significance of incarnation has to do with Jesus' coming into the fullest reality of man while at the same time he didn't lose his divine reality. This is the calling to us all too in our dealings and confrontation with our culture; like Jesus who upheld the positive elements of the culture within which he lived and not only spoke against, but also worked against the negative elements of the same culture, we also are called to uphold the positive aspects of our cultures, while we work to the best of our ability to amend and correct the negative aspects. If culture is understood as a collectivity of a people's way of life, we will do well to understand it as an inherent good that in its expression has sometimes been tainted with sin and thus needs to be redeemed again by Christ.

### **Questions to Ponder:**

1. Can you mention some negative and positive ones among your family cultures
2. In what ways can we correct or even discourage negative cultural practices

**Task:** Guide against participating in unchristian family cultures to avoid sins

## THE MOST HOLY TRINITY (SOLEMNITY)

**DATE: 12/06/2022**

**THEME FOR THE MONTH:  
BASIC AFRICAN VALUES AND CHRISTIAN FAITH**

**THEME FOR THE WEEK:  
FAITH AND CULTURE**

**Biblical References:** Is 56:6-8, Jas 2:14-26

Faith is a supernatural gift of God that makes us believe what God has revealed without doubt. It is an assent of the total person to a given reality. The letter to the Hebrews explains faith as an assurance of things hoped for, a confirmation of things not seen (cf. Heb. 11.1). The catechism of the Catholic Church sees faith as "man's response to God, who reveals himself and gives himself to man...". This response has to be expressed in a concrete and visible manner and this mode of expression has its greatest medium in culture, which is a collection of a people's way of life. This link between faith and culture reveals the importance of one to the other in that faith is en-fleshed, incarnated in culture, while culture in its own part is transformed by faith. In the absence of faith, culture is not able to purify itself from the stains of sin, while faith without culture is deprived of a mode of expression.

### **Questions to Ponder:**

1. Give an example of cultural practices that can affect your catholic faith
2. Can you describe a cultural practice that cannot affect christian faith

**Task:** Guard your faith against negative cultural practices.



**THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST  
(SOLEMNITY)      DATE: 19/06/2022**

**THEME FOR THE MONTH:  
BASIC AFRICAN VALUES AND CHRISTIAN FAITH**

**THEME FOR THE WEEK:  
POSITIVE VALUES OF OUR CULTURE (PART 1)**

**Biblical References:** Matt 8:5-13, Matt. 10:25

To help in the expression of our faith, some positive values or aspects of our culture will hereby be discussed:

1) **Respect for Life:** The African culture respects and honours life. To an average African, life is precious and has to be guided by every means. In the same vein, it is believed that life is a gift from God and thus, no human has the right to take or waste it.

2) **Respect for Elders:** The very high value that is placed on respect for elders is almost unrivaled in the African culture. The elderly is seen as someone who should be obeyed and this is shown even in the catechetical explanation of the fourth commandment whereby an average African catechist will immediately add to it that not only parents are to be obeyed and honoured, but everyone and anyone older than us.

3) **Dignity of Labour:** The great attention paid to the dignity of labour by the African culture is in line with the dictate of faith. For an average African, it is a taboo to indulge in laziness because a lazy man will eventually turn out to be a thief and as such, no family condones laziness. No matter how the nature of the work is, every work is of dignity and we should be proud of it.

4) **Living for Others:** To live a happy life is to make others happy around you. This explains the deep value of the African society which sees the joy of others as a personal concern of all and sundry. Individualistic life is a taboo amongst Africans as what each person does should have an impact on the well-being of the entire society.

**Questions to Ponder:**

1. Do you think that African culture has any value in children-upbringing? Describe an example
2. Can you mention two positive values of your own native culture

**Task:** Reconcile your faith with the positive African culture

**THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST  
(SOLEMNITY) DATE: 26/06/2022**

**THEME FOR THE MONTH:  
BASIC AFRICAN VALUES AND CHRISTIAN FAITH**

**THEME FOR THE WEEK:  
POSITIVE VALUES OF OUR CULTURE (PART 2)**

**Biblical References:** Mk 12:14, Matt. 5:38-45

The following are the second part of the positive values of our culture:

1) **Hospitality:** Hospitality is considered a given value for an African. From childhood, every child is taught to make life easy and comfortable for strangers in our midst. In line with this, people with special needs are also special given attention so as to make them live a life that is comfortable. Like Abraham who welcome angels unknowingly while being hospitable, so also does the African society requests of all to be good to strangers.

2) **Covenant Keeping:** Faithfulness to covenant and vows is a

thing an African cannot joke with. When covenants are made, the covenant master ensures its fulfilment. A focus on this positive cultural value will help us in keeping to the covenants of our baptism.

**3) Sense of Sacredness:** The respect accorded to sacred things and practices within the African society cannot be over-emphasised. The feeling of aweness permeates the surrounding of everything sacred, and while worship is done in an atmosphere of great joy that includes singing, drumming and dancing, nevertheless the high point of worship which connects the mortal man with the Divine is done in an atmosphere of deep, sanctifying silence. Sacred places are adored and referenced, and no one can profane the sacredness without being brought to book.

**4) Chastity before marriage:** In the area of sexual morality, the sacredness of virginity before marriage is upheld in many African societies and to toy with this great gift of God normally brings shame and unacceptance from the society to the victim. This appreciation for chastity before marriage helps young men and women to protect themselves and offer themselves to their would-be spouses as a precious and untarnished gift.

### **Questions to Ponder:**

1. Can you differentiate "covenants in christianity from those in African culture" □
2. Comment on today's pre-marriage chastity as practised in true African culture
3. What can you say of the "sense of sacredness" in basic African culture vis-à-vis christian culture

**Task:** Critically examine the list of so-called positive African cultural perspectives and determine those to accept

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*“...The words that I have spoken to you  
are spirit and they are life”*

*John 6:63*

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