

Genesis



Lesson 2: In His Image

Suggested Responses

Suggested responses are provided for the purposes of guiding group discussion safely within the bounds of Church teaching. Small group discussion leaders should become familiar with the suggested responses prior to group discussion. In order to make the most of this study, all participants are encouraged to respond to the questions on their own before reading the suggested responses.

1. In Genesis 2:15, we see that God intends Adam to “till and keep” the Garden. This is the action of a rational being, one who is able to “keep” something committed to his care, and even to bring it into a higher state of order. In Genesis 2:19, Adam exercises dominion over creation by assigning a name to “every living creature.” Thus, Adam acts as a father towards these creatures. In Genesis 1:8, God names his creation, “And God called the firmament Heaven.” In Genesis 2:19, Adam names God’s creatures, “and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.” Of course, there is also an infinite difference between God and Adam. Although Adam is made in God’s image, he is nevertheless God’s creature. In Genesis 1, the word of God brings things into being from nothing. The word of Adam, though authoritative in its own sphere, simply assigns a name to the beings that God has made.

2. Since God is indeed love, the primary way in which man might strive to most perfectly reflect God is to “love.” Jesus tells us to “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” This goal, while unattainable in this life, is ever kept before us in the journey of our lives by following his command to “love one another as I have loved you.” What does that mean? The life of Jesus, who in his sacred humanity is a true brother, gives us an inexhaustible example of how we might strive to reflect the Father’s image by loving as he has loved. St. John emphasizes the centrality of love in the life of God and in the lives of those who would share in the Father’s life through his Son and Holy Spirit. All who take seriously Jesus’ exhortation to “be perfect” would do well to keep this in mind. While the divine nature is essentially invisible, those who abide in love enjoy the deepest fellowship with the Holy Trinity, the creator and sustainer of all things.



3. The Blessed Trinity is one, yet at the same time, also a community of Persons living in relationship. This relationship between divine Persons is a life-giving exchange of eternal love, so that we can say, “God is love.” Human sexuality “affects all aspects of the human person; body and soul” (CCC 2332), and when properly expressed within the confines of marriage is an act of self-giving love; and so it affords husband and wife an opportunity to reflect the life of the Blessed Trinity in an extraordinarily profound way.

4. As CCC 1643 states, conjugal love that most truly reflects the life of God is one that involves a totality in which the spouses entirely and completely give of themselves. They do this by means modeling their acts of love after the total self-giving of God as brought into full view in the life of Christ. As St. Paul tells us, this involves an exchange of loving submission and complete self-sacrifice between the spouses. Necessarily, this would include openness to fertility in which nothing is held back from the beloved. Though this teaching can often present a substantial challenge, it is not difficult to see how withholding one’s fertility is irreconcilable with the example of love provided to mankind in the life of Christ. Today, many Catholics struggle with the Church’s teaching regarding contraception. Sadly, relatively few of those who resist this teaching have taken the time to read and prayerfully contemplate the papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in order to properly uphold the obligation to rightly form one’s conscience. One of the best ways we can help those who struggle to accept this teaching is to urge them to do so.

5. God rested, not out of any need existing within himself, but solely for the good of Man. Man is made in God’s image and only fulfills his purpose in truth to the extent in which he reflects and models God’s own actions. In God’s rest, Man is given a model for his own life. The Seventh Day in Genesis exists so that we might see in the Scriptural account of God’s creative work an example of the “rhythm of work and rest” that we too must follow (CCC 2184). This day of rest is one in which we refrain from our work to enjoy the fruits of our labor -- not as individuals, but in communion with all of creation. This necessarily means a rest that allows us to not only disengage from earthly concerns, but to more fully enter into communion with the source of all creation.

6. We discover in CCC 2002 that God rested on the Seventh Day not simply to show us how to live week in and week out, but also in order to signify the eternal rest toward which we strive throughout our entire lives. The typical week, for believers, is a microcosm of a lifetime in which we work and strive and journey toward that blessed and holy day of rest that will never end. This is especially true for Catholics whose day of rest includes entrance into the heavenly liturgy -- the Sacrifice of the Mass during which we touch eternity and are filled with the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ who at the end of time will be “all in all.”



7. In directly commanding Man not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and plainly telling him of the consequences for doing so, the conditions of knowledge and consent were established should Adam and Eve choose to partake of its fruit. This command should not be seen exclusively as a test or as a prohibition, however, but also as a Fatherly act of protection. As Jesus tells his disciples, in Matt 18:3, only those who become like children are able to enter the kingdom of heaven. In other words, we must return to innocence. In Genesis 2:16 God was acting to protect the childlike innocence of Man, and of mankind in general, so that he might remain ever in God's friendship and eligible to enter heaven. Even today, when we view teachings of the Church as a list of things that we can and cannot do, we fall into error and miss the entire point. We should see the teachings of the Church less as prohibitions and more as the loving guidance of a Holy Mother.

8. In relatively few words, St. Paul makes it exceedingly clear that both male and female are of equal dignity, and what's more, in a certain way each one is dependent upon the other. Gen 2:21-22 teaches us that woman is formed from Man. Rather than seeing this as evidence of an implied bias in Scripture in favor of the male, it should more properly be viewed as referring to man's dependence upon woman for he would remain incomplete without her. This is expressed in the man's initial greeting to the woman, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Pope John Paul II speaks a great deal about the "Original Unity of Man and Woman" in his *Theology of the Body*. He explained that the state of "original unity" of our first parents in some sense proceeds from the state of "original solitude" and is based on their "masculinity and femininity, as if on two different 'incarnations,' that is, on two ways of 'being a body' of the same human being created 'in the image of God'." Further, the Holy Father teaches, "we can conclude that man (*adam*) falls into that 'sleep' in order to wake up 'male' and 'female'... Perhaps, therefore, the analogy of sleep indicates here not so much a passing from consciousness to sub-consciousness, as a specific return to non-being. That is, it indicates a return to the moment preceding the creation, that through God's creative initiative, solitary 'man' may emerge from it again in his double unity as male and female." (*TOB*, pp. 43-44) The Church's teaching on the dignity of women is profound and clear. This is reflected in the very fact alone that the Church sees herself in the feminine, as Holy Mother. Additionally, our faith teaches us that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the most highly exalted of all created human beings; She is the model of perfection toward which the Pilgrim Church journeys. As we move forward in the study of Sacred Scripture, it is important to realize that Scripture is God's revelation as played out in the story of human history, and it reflects not just God in his infinite perfections, but also Man in his many imperfections. As we will see in our next lesson, sin upset the harmony of all creation, and had an immediate impact on the relationship between man and woman. Human culture in different times and places, as illustrated in Scripture, often reflects the disharmony resulting from sin. It is important to remain focused by training one's eye to see the eternal truths of Sacred Scripture even as they are at times revealed in stark contrast to the behavior of wounded and sinful humankind.