

Faith Formation Introduction

S t . I g n a t i u s L o y o l a P a r i s h

More than the Catechism

Areas for Faith Formation

- When was the last time I looked to enhance my faith by reading, exploring or discussing my faith with others?
- What "spiritual reading" have you done in the last year? That might be scripture, a magazine or the life of a saint.
- When was the last time you participated in a retreat or day of recollection? Have you ever gone back and revisited the graces of that time?
- Have I gone "online" to spend time with religious art, music or poetry?
- What is it that I want to grow in my faith?

Inside this issue:

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| More than the Catechism | 1 |
| What is a Spirituality? | 1 |
| What's a Jesuit Parish | 2 |
| How can I grow my faith? | 2 |

There's an old joke about getting rid of pigeons in the bell tower. Baptize and confirm them and they will never come back.

Well there is a ring of truth in the sense that as a church we often times fail to offer much in the way of instruction after confirmation. Sure, there's the Sunday homily and there's the occasional retreat, but how does one continue forming themselves as Christians throughout their lives? I guess we consider you all to be grown ups and able to manage that on your own. Still, it would be good to offer some resources and some direction. That's the

purpose of this newsletter.

Now I never want to accuse anyone of shirking their responsibility of keeping their faith alive. The problem is, many don't know where to start. Even seminarians are given a spiritual director to help guide them along the path. Each month we hope to fill in some of the traditions and pathways to a richer faith life.

Everyone is different. We are offering a number of resources, some of which might interest and help, some of which won't. Choose what works and run with it.

Remember, you're never too old to learn and to learn you need to ask questions.

What's a Spirituality?

You may have heard folks say that they are spiritual but not religious. In many cases that means that they have jettisoned organized religion in favor of their own path. A spirituality, on the other hand, is a lens or focus that helps one to understand and live out their religion. It is not a separate thing. Soon we will celebrate the feast day of St.

Vincent de Paul. For those who follow the "spirituality" of St. Vincent, the lens or focus of their Christianity is seeing the face of Christ in the poor. " St. Vincent teaches us to see Christ in the poor and suffering, so much so that the poor become our Lords and Masters and we their servants." With this as a spiritual compass one would tend to favor certain scripture passages or

stories over others. (E.G. Matthew 25:34-40.) And it is more likely that those following St. Vincent would be found more on the streets than in monasteries. This is a Spirituality.

We will present some examples but there are many more and many variations. Consider what works for you and run with it.

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Finding God in All Things

One of the questions that we ask folks who join the parish is "Why Loyola?" Some respond that it is because it is a "Jesuit" parish. That means that, not only are we staffed by Jesuits, we tend to reflect a certain "Spirituality" which we call either Jesuit or Ignatian (the more inclusive term.)

A foundational difference that is usually not talked about is the difference between a Jesuit and a diocesan priest. Dioceses are territorial areas that are under the care of a bishop. Denver is fortunate to have an archbishop and to have more than one bishop serving her. Nevertheless, those who enter the seminary do so for a particular diocese and serve under that bishop. As such, their focus is usually the parish, parish school and the territory in which they are found.

Jesuits (most religious order priests as well) oriented towards a particular charism (work or apostolate) and serve under a religious superior who may be in charge of an area that spans many different dioceses. As a result, the Jesuit parish may differ from the diocese in a number of ways. One—Jesuit staff may come from a far greater territory and have been trained very differently. Two—the focus and priorities of the Jesuit parish may be broader than that of a particular territory. Three—the Spirituality that is often preached and practiced by the Jesuit staff will be that of St. Ignatius. And, although mostly the same, we have some differences in our liturgical calendars where we tend to include some of the minor Jesuit saints that may not have a feast day in the diocesan calendar.

How can I grow my faith?

"Practice, practice, practice." That's how one grows in faith. Does that mean that I go to church more frequently or pray the rosary more often? Not necessarily. If we were using a sports metaphor, you might want to consider weight training or cardiovascular exercise to build yourself up. If we were using a culinary metaphor, you might want to travel to different regions to discover different dishes, seasonings and cooking methods. I believe it is the same with faith.

What areas would I include in growing faith.

- * Obviously, prayer—to experiment a bit with the different techniques of prayer.
- * The Bible, read a bit more of scripture, but also consider learning more about scripture. That might

mean some bible study or glancing at some biblical commentaries where experts help to fill in background with cultural, language and literary details. (Did you know that when Mary responds to Elizabeth with the Magnificat Lk1:46-55, it sounds lot like the prayer of Hannah from the book of Samuel. 1Sam2:1-10)

- * Learning about some of the saints and their spirituality (Franciscan, Benedictine, etc.) including some of the women's religious orders.
- * Discovering Catholic Social Teaching, one of the greatest gifts the Church has to give. While many will speak of Catholic Social Teaching as Faith in Action, the Jesuits tend to pair it as Faith and Justice. In either case, it is considered an essential aspect of our faith.

- * And lastly community. While there are some who chose a solitary life to develop their faith (hermits), most of need one another to help us to grow our faith. We need the prayers and support of one another which is why we gather as a church community.
- * Sometimes that community is enhanced outside of those in our own territory—those who share the same spirituality or same cause. The internet is wonderful at helping us to learn from and about others, if we are willing to spend the time to grow ourselves. I especially love the [GlobalSistersReport](#) which introduces so many different ways and places where religious sisters live and grow their faith.