

The Heart of Discipleship



Seven Pillars of Discipleship



**The Seven Pillars of
Discipleship**

**Christ Centered
Word**

Sacrament

Prayer

Obedience

Communio

Evangelization

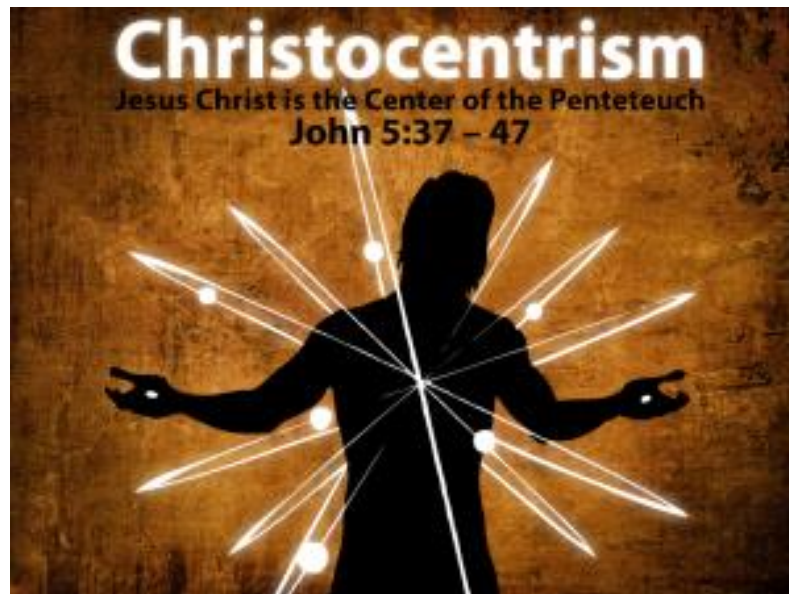
Seven Pillars of Discipleship

Opening Statement:

The goal in every aspect of discipleship is liberating happiness. We all want to be free and we all want to be happy: disciples of Jesus Christ know this freedom and happiness. The big question is, "*how* am I supposed to fulfill the great command to go make disciples?" And for that matter, "*what* exactly am I supposed to do to become a disciple?" To answer the first question, in short, to make disciples is to do - for one person or a group - everything that Jesus did for the original 12 disciples. To form others with the formation you yourself have received. You yourself are a disciple, an intimate follower of Jesus and "to make disciples" is to intentionally guide another person or group into that same relationship which you share with Christ. Therefore the *how* is in the *what*? Let's ask ourselves "how did I become a disciple and am I living

it fully, how can I improve and then, and only then, how can I go on to cooperate with Christ in guiding another?" Likely you were baptized before anything else, or perhaps not, but at some point you had to come to know Jesus through His Word, through Prayer and to respond to Him by coming to Obey all His teachings. This did not happen magically in isolation but was in your family or with fellow disciples that you were Evangelized and came to share in the joy of Communion as a Catholic disciple. If we are not clear on what discipleship is how can we be grounded? For this reason we want to make it very clear and understand what discipleship is, so that like a solid pillar, we are not shaken from our life's purposes.

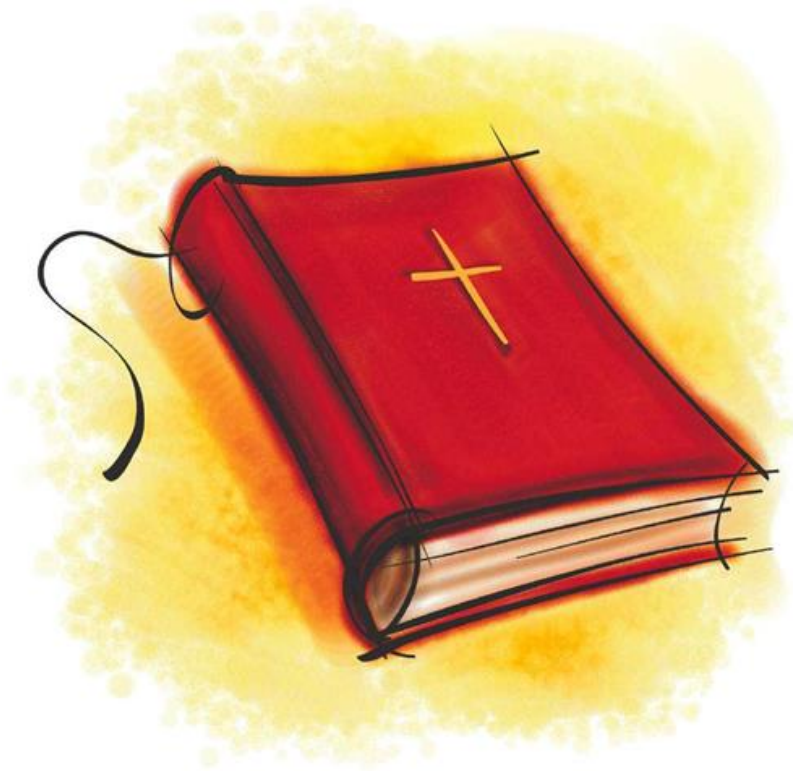
*What follows in these pages is a thorough but not comprehensive review of this living, breathing reality: the **Seven Pillars for a Disciple of Jesus Christ**.*



1. CHRISTOCENTRISM: the world, the flesh and the devil want us to keep centered on anything but Christ. We are, because of original sin, inclined toward a kind of idolatry, or for a softer way to put it: toward lies about who and what is most important. Discipleship begins when we make our focus, our true north, Jesus Christ. As St Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). For some of us this is a minor tweaking, for others this is a complete paradigm shift. To have Christ at the center really is an awareness, an acknowledgement of the grace of baptism,

that the Trinity is dwelling in you, FATHER, SON, HOLY SPIRIT. It is to remain in that recollected state where, because you are in a state of grace, you are constantly striving to abide in Christ. It is a distinct pillar from all the rest, it can be found in the other six and all of the others are aimed at more and more deeply claiming this reality that Christ is the center of all things!

Now let's take a close look at the other pillars of discipleship to see how we can focus, refocus and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.



2. WORD: Jesus says in John 8, "If you make My word your home, you will indeed be My disciples, you will come to know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). This Word includes both Sacred Scripture and Tradition. Jesus is the living Word who came down from heaven. He is at once in heaven and equally alive within each one of us, loving us and saving us. Spending time daily reading/contemplating His words in Sacred Scripture (SS) is an absolute essential of every Catholic disciple. You can only love someone as much as you know them. Jesus,

the living Word also continues to reveal Himself through the Church in Sacred Tradition (ST). In a certain sense, the SS is the product of ST, therefore the interpretation of SS or any revelation must come from ST. So knowing the Nicene Creed and striving to become familiar with the Catechism of the Catholic Church or the YouCat is strongly recommended. Regardless, this pillar means that interpretation of any aspect of reality is always measured off of the both SS and ST.

The SACRAMENTS



3. SACRAMENT: Jesus was no mere philosopher, nor His words just theological concepts. He is the "Word made flesh" who "dwelt among us" (John 1:14), the Truth incarnate. Jesus therefore to continue His physical intimacy with His disciples after the Ascension instituted seven Sacraments which Jesus gave to the Apostles and their successors the Catholic priests. They mediate His presence to us in both a symbolic but also a real and tangible way. They are not liturgical inventions of man but rather the means Jesus has given us and commanded us to use to come in direct contact with the Trinity. The first three are called the sacraments of initiation.

BAPTISM washes away original sin, makes us into sons and daughters of God, and mediates the Seal of the Holy Spirit; leaving an indelible mark on our souls.

CONFIRMATION strengthens the baptismal grace and empowers us with certain Charisms that make us strong witnesses or apostles in the world.

EUCCHARIST is the source and summit of our faith. In a sense we receive all the other sacraments for the Eucharist. While in appearance bread and wine, the Eucharist is the real presence of Jesus Christ: Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity (God).

CONFESSION is the sacrament by which any sin after baptism is removed. Sin brings us shame and guilt and Confession washes away that guilt.

HOLY ORDERS includes, deacons, priests and bishops. Like Baptism and Confirmation you can only receive this sacrament once as it leaves an indelible mark or character on your soul. Only a validly ordained priest (apostolic succession) can celebrate the Holy Eucharist, hear Confessions, and give anointing of the sick. All the baptized mediate to the world the Person of Christ, the Ordained mediate the Person of Christ the Head.

HOLY MATRIMONY or marriage was raised from a natural good to a supernatural good, a sacrament. Those who are married in the Catholic Church receive a special grace which strengthens their bond and their love throughout life. They are also a symbol to the world of the Love/Union of Christ and the Church.

ANOINTING OF THE SICK is the mediation of Christ love, dignity, strength and healing for Catholics who because of illness are in danger of death or an illness that has a remote possible outcome of death.

The disciple of Jesus faithfully stays close by to Jesus through the frequent reception of the sacraments. Most authentic disciples go to Mass not only once a week on Sunday's but try to go to daily Mass if possible as well as Eucharistic Adoration and frequent use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Rooting out the lies and filling up on the Truth incarnate.



4. PRAYER: even Jesus who had before Him at all times the beatific vision, slipped away each morning to pray (see Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12) and often all night long. Prayer is the most intimate Pillar of the deep friendship of the Disciple. As St. Theresa of Avila says, it is an "intimate conversation" between the disciple and the living God. As the disciple learns more and more how to pray and all its parts, they finally grow into an intimate union that cannot be shaken by exterior distractions/disturbances. They have the true and lasting happiness of God living within their Soul! -There are a number of different methods and purposes of prayer, ultimately leading to the prayer of the hearts union with the Trinity. Praise, Adoration, Supplication, Thanksgiving, Meditation and Contemplation are all in some sense found in the sacrifice of the Mass.

Each of these eventually need to be part of our daily prayer, both in and outside of liturgical prayer, though liturgical prayer is meant to be the supreme act of worship of God - the heights of prayer - because it is the way God has asked us to worship Him - Holy Mass!

- ❖ Rosary: both meditation and petition
- ❖ Divine Mercy Chaplet: petition/devotional
- ❖ Lectio Divina: Scriptural meditation
- ❖ Eucharistic Adoration: Holy Hours, etc
- ❖ Novenas and Litanies: usually petitionary

STAGES OF INTERIOR LIFE: --there are three stages of the spiritual life or journey to union with Trinity:

- a) Purgative: during which the soul is working hard to move toward union with God
- b) Illuminative: God doing the work, but soul must still fight to "allow" God to take possession of it - which includes a dark/dry time in prayer
- c) Unitive: when the soul is permanently united to God interiorly and is in a perpetual state of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and dependence on God. Essentially in permanent joy.

As a point of note, one does not cease to be a disciple once in the Unitive way but it is the goal of the Discipler to get them to the beginnings of the second (Illuminative) stage, as after that only a spiritual director can take a soul from there. Jesus said, "I can that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10)



5. OBEY: As the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) puts it "Life in Christ" which includes everything from obedience to the 10 Commandments, to understanding the 7 Vices and overcoming them with the Theological, Cardinal and Moral Virtues, to the moral precepts of both SS/ST and the authority of the Magisterium. Jesus said, "If anyone has my commandments and obeys them, he it is who loves me, he who loves me will be loved by My Father, I too will love him and We will come and make our dwelling within him" (John 14:15). Obedience is much more than just another thing we do. It is the response of love to Jesus who loves you so much! Until we respond to Him in obedience we do not have the true joy that is in a

real sense received from Christ in His Word, Sacraments and Prayer. This is first and foremost the "obedience of faith." Neither Communion nor authentic Evangelization can happen unless we finally make this act of the will, the choice to accept the upper ward call of Christ. In obedience rather than making us slaves, we submit ourselves to God and the more we do, the more truly free we become. Therefore it is great wisdom to dedicate ourselves to understanding the commands and the virtues so that we can more and more become the slaves of God and get ourselves free from the bondage of this world and its lies! Through the Word and Prayer we are interiorly freed to Obey, which brings true happiness. As Jesus after giving His new commandment, "love one another as I have loved you" then explained, "I tell you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be overflowing" (John 15:10-12).

6. COMMUNIO:

The full expression of this pillar is experienced in the Mass where we are all gathered together around Christ in the Eucharist. The minimum but also necessary element of Communio is when two Christians ask each other "how's your soul?" and actually listen and want to really know. Communio is something different than what is expressed by the word Community, just as Friendship is different than a Christian Friendship. There is something fundamentally, substantially, and objectively unique between the two options. It is different in both the direction and the nature of the gathering. For example communities can be good or bad, athletes are gathered together around the goal of honing their skill and winning games. But the mafia, a gathering of villains, murderers and crooks as a community is only going to foster the lies and vices. Athletes can equally be motivated by their community to grow in vice. A certain mutual affection may arise from the common purpose and in as much as they share certain values a kind of friendship may come about. But unless Communio or Christian friendship is established the thing could be a mile

wide but will never have the kind of depth to bear the eternal fruit of actually making Christ present. Jesus said "where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in their midst." This is both the achievement and nature of what Communio is, the indwelling of Christ in the gathering of the baptized. Just as Christ dwells in individuals, when they are gathered with a certain kind of openness to God and each other, real Communio happens and it imitates the Trinity, the central Mystery of our faith. When you have true Communio, it is a taste of heaven, this is what the Mass always is and what small groups of disciples can be. It also propels the disciples into evangelization and is its foundation: "they will know that you are my disciples by the love you have for each other" (John 13:35).



7. EVANGELIZATION:

Means Two things - Proclamation of the Gospel and Testimony by word and deed. It flows from deep union with God through living out the first 5 pillars and is the overflow of the 6th pillar. It includes the works of mercy both spiritual and corporal but these are either a fruit or aimed at the goal of proclamation of the essential Gospel or what is called in Greek the Kerygma. To do acts of service without also being kerygmatic is to aim to do dead works as St. Paul and James speak of in their Epistles. Paul says the Kerygma is the "power of God for the salvation of souls!" And that the Kerygma MUST be preached! "Whoa to me if I do not proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ!"(1 Cor 9:16) It is an essential part of the joy Christ offers us, it is truly a pillar of Catholic Discipleship. Canon law says that all the lay faithful have both "the right and responsibility to evangelize" (Code of Canon Law, 211). Until it is shared, happiness is still only in seed form for the

disciple. We have begun to be freed from the lies but not fully activated into the happiness were made for.



Closing Statement and Challenge:

The heart of Discipleship is that Christ is the Center of all things, the measurement and guide for all of your thoughts, words and actions. Christocentrism is to strive always to put first things first and all other things to order them around this one focus: Jesus Christ and my relationship to Him. Therefore we must strive more and more to imitate His model of disciple making. So Jesus had His 3, His 12, His 72 and only then did He have His multitudes, which He then broke down into smaller discipleship groups who were gathered together around the Word and Bread of Christ. We must ask ourselves, "does my life, my ministry and plan mirror the model Jesus gave us? How can I more fully imitate this for myself, for the people or youth I am working with, and is my ultimate aim in ministry and life the same discipleship goal of Jesus Christ?"

This is not just a one time, one day recollection. This is a living breathing organism that ought to keep us moving always closer and closer to our goal: to live perfectly the seven pillars, remain always free, recollected, to become grounded, with Christ at the center of our lives.



Notes: