

## Introduction

- I. First week: the question “what is religion?”
  - A. What is the meaning of everything?
  - B. Religions each answer in a particular way
- II. Christianity’s answer, briefly, is drastically different than the rest
  - A. Our goal is theosis / divinization – to become like God in heaven.
    1. This is done both in the present life and fulfilled in the next
    2. Our worship and prayer brings us into relationship with God and assists us in this task
  - B. Afterlife is to be unlike any other religion’s claim
    1. United with the Divine
    2. Maintain individuality
    3. Afterlife is not awful
- III. Today, we’re going to talk about the core of the Gospel message. The fancy Greek word for this is the Kerygma.
  - A. We’re going to be following the structure of an excellent book that I ran across last year called *Rescued* by Fr. John Riccardo. This man knows how to preach the Gospel.
  - B. A couple weeks ago, I proposed to you all that the biggest question in our hearts, the question that religion addresses, is the question of “what does it all mean?” But there are other questions, just as meaningful to us, and they point us in the same direction:
    1. Why am I here? – not *here*, but why am I *on this earth*?
    2. Where am I going? – again, not as in this afternoon, but where is my life taking me?
    3. How do I get there?
  - C. As we try to answer these questions, we come to recognize that there are convictions we hold. Here are some that I share with Fr. Riccardo:
    1. We are not alive by chance. Each of us was willed into existence, which means that we were created for this moment. St. Joan of Arc is reported to have said, “I am not afraid. God is with me. I was born for this!” Each of us was born for this exact moment in time. And the question facing is: Am I going to stand up and have the courage to *really* live?
    2. The is in a bad place right now. Fr. Riccardo says it this way, “the world is crying.” In 2018, for the first time in a hundred years, life expectancy declined for the third consecutive year. This was before COVID, before any of that. In 1918, World War I and the Spanish Flu Epidemic, which killed more people than any other plague in history, (which actually came from Kansas, around Manhattan, if I understand the history correctly) were the primary causes for the drop in life expectancy. In 2018, the main causes of these early deaths were suicide, cirrhosis of the liver, and opioid addiction. Something. Is. Wrong.
    3. The Church is crying too. Our Church has many troubles, but at its heart the Church wants to help heal humanity. But the people doing the work are so busy fighting fires, we can never get to the root. A good analogy Fr. Riccardo uses is that working in the Church is like a football game: “there are twenty-two men desperately in need of rest racing around the field, and they’re being watched by thousands of people in the stands who are desperately in need of exercise.” (15)

- D. Here's the deal: God wants his world back. And that means he wants me back. He wants you back. He wants us all back, because he wants to pull all of his children from the despair that they are confronted with, and he wants us all to experience the joy of Heaven. So he made us for this exact moment in time, and he gave us exactly what we need to be living in this world right here and right now.
- E. The Gospel is God's response to the despairs of this world. St. Paul, in the Letter to the Romans, writes, "I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." He says the Gospel is the *power* of God. The Greek word he uses is *dunamis*. *Dynamite* comes from this world. The Gospel is not some random book of nice stories. It is the story of how God's power *exploded into the world so that we might be saved*.
1. Imagine it is June 6, 1944, and you live in Normandy, France. "Military forces from the United States, England, and Canada [...] are landing on five [...] beaches." (20) You know they are here for one reason: to fight a monster.
  2. Imagine another scene. You're in a cave in Bethlehem. A young, poor Jewish woman has just given birth to a baby boy. Her husband, Joseph, is with her. They look at their child. We, looking around, might wonder, "Why is he here?"
  3. These two scenes are more related than you might think.
  4. Imagine waking up on June 7, 1944. You open the paper and see the massive headline: The Allies Landed at Normandy. The person sitting across from you asks, "anything happen yesterday?" You reply, "Not really. Something with the Allies on the beach at Normandy. Looks like it might rain."
  5. This is obviously absurd, but this is how we encounter the Gospel message, because we don't know the truth about what God was doing when the child Jesus was born on Christmas Day those 2000 or so years ago. The answer to that question we might ask in the cave in Bethlehem, "*Why is he here?*", is the same: God sent his invasion force to destroy the megalomaniacal monster that came to this earth to enslave and destroy humanity. His invasion force looked like a simple baby. But this baby came ready to fight for our souls.
  6. But we so often *just can't see it*. We hear about Christianity and the Gospel from society so often that it fades into the background. We don't have the context we need to understand the explosiveness of its message.
- F. Today I want to give you that context. I want to proclaim the core of the Gospel and why it matters to you. We call this proclamation the *kerygma*. It's a fun Greek word you can use to impress your friend, but is also the most important thing in the whole universe. The Good News of the Gospel and why it matters, the *kerygma*, can be proclaimed by answering four questions.
1. *Why is there something rather than nothing?* Created.
  2. *Why is everything so obviously messed up?* Captured.
  3. *What, if anything, has God done about it?* Rescued.
  4. *If God has done something, how should I respond?* Response.

## Created

- IV. In the Beginning...
- A. When reading the Bible, we have to recognize that it's a library of books. It's not one monolithic book written by an author or a team. It's a bunch of different books written by different

(inspired) human beings. These books are also different types of books collected in one volume: history, poetry, prayers, etc. And these books are ancient, so they were written differently than you or I might write them: they answer different questions.

- B. The Bible is trying to help us get at the truth. Not mathematical truth. Moral truth. The answer to “why?” and not the answer to “how?”
- C. Genesis: there are two creation stories back-to-back. We say they are both true. And yet, we’re also not crazy people. We noticed that the sun and moon were created on the fourth day of creation, but without the sun and moon the idea of days doesn’t even make sense. God isn’t revealing *how* he created, but *why*. The Genesis accounts of creation both speak to us of God’s taming of chaos and the insertion of order into nature. If God has created an order, he has done so for a reason. He has taken the randomness out of creation. Why? Simply: love.
- D. Let’s consider how unique this idea is. Remember last week—the pagan religions had many gods with more faults than us. The worldview that would arise from such a belief system tells us that humanity has no inherent dignity, but are merely beings enslaved by more powerful forces such as the gods. Our modern worldview, in essence that there is no universal truth results in the same conclusion: nothing, including humanity, has any importance or dignity. We can see the worldly powers that enslave us, but are oblivious to the malevolent spiritual forces engaged in the same act. Compare this to the view Genesis gives us:
  - 1. There is only one God. He is good, complete, and needs nothing outside himself. He created everything freely, effortlessly, generously. He created all out of love. Everything was created good—we are told this repeatedly. The culmination of this creation is humanity. Man and woman were created in the image and likeness of God, both complementary to one another and equal in dignity. The goal of humanity is union with God.
  - 2. Man represents God on earth; assists God in his rule over the earth; has reason; freedom for
  - 3. This view of humanity is shockingly different. Incredible dignity inherent in humanity, but also an incredible need to receive, nothing on earth will satisfy; but a provident Father does
- E. Back to an earlier point: we were created to be loved and to love. In that order. God loves us. Full stop. We do not have to earn his love. We already have it. This is a big deal, because let’s consider this God who loves us. Genesis 1:16, “God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night, and the stars.” – “oh yeah, and the stars” – the stars are incomprehensible to us. In our galaxy, there are probably 100 billion stars. In our 46 billion LY universe, there are probably 100 billion galaxies. As an afterthought. Canis Major & 7 quadrillion earths. But God knows your name. And he loves you.
  - 1. Love answers the questions. **Why am I here?** God created us out of his love for us. **Where am I going?** God loves you, so he wants you with him for eternity so that he can share his life with you. **How do I get there?** God love for us which was revealed by his Son, Jesus, and by our response of love to him and each other.
  - 2. This is easily within God’s power. *Maybe* God can help, we might think. *He created the stars.*

## Captured

- V. So... What the hell happened? Because love doesn’t seem to be dominant in the world.
  - A. This is the hard part. This is the bad stuff. Because human history, the story given to us through the Bible, the reality we live in isn’t just about God and you and me. There’s another. The

scriptures reveal what happened, and what always happens to each an every one of us. Satan has been running the same playbook for millennia. God taught us how to fight him though. But first we have to know our enemy: Who he is; Why he hates us; What he's called; His strategy; His tactics; and His goal for us.

- B. First off: our enemy is real. He was created good, just like all the other angels. He was, in fact, one of the highest of angels, known as "light bearer" or "Lucifer" in Latin. He rebelled against God. From just this, we've learned much: he was created, so he has no power over God; but he is also called the ruler of this world, so he is not powerless; he is an angelic being, so he is not to be taken lightly, for he is much more powerful and intelligent than us.
  - 1. We make a mistake thinking "that we were born into some sort of neutral territory, when in fact you and I were born in a war zone and into a battle." This is the battle over creation, and it is the battle for our souls.
  - 2. His names, "Satan"—the accuser and "devil"—the divider
  - 3. Why did he rebel? Envy, the sadness over the good fortune of another, of *us*. Because of the role we would fulfill in creation, he would serve us and he resented the good coming to us.
  - 4. God created us, sought to give us freedom for flourishing, and wishes to elevate us to his life.
  - 5. Hell's strategy makes a mockery of all thing: it seeks to destroy, enslave, degrade.
- C. Strategy: to separate us from God and pick us off. "to convince us that God is not a good Father, that we can't trust him, and that we can be happy without him."
- D. Tactics: accuses, lies, divides, flatters, tempts, discourages.
- E. Goal: enslavement. We either belong to God, or we belong to the other. In the Bible, Death and Sin are powers. Death comes for us all, whether we want it or not. There is nothing we can do about it. Sin is a power too: think about it, have you ever done something that you didn't actually want to do, that you hated doing, but you did it anyway? Because the ruler of this world hates us, he works to enslave us and give Sin and Death power over us. We need to be rescued, because we can't get ourselves out of it.

## Rescued

VI. Remember that part about how God loves us?

Can the prey be taken from the mighty,  
or the captives of a tyrant be rescued?

Surely, thus says the LORD:

"Even the captives of the might shall be taken,  
and the prey of the tyrant shall be rescued,  
for I will contend with those who contend with you. . . .

Then all flesh shall know

that I am the LORD your Savior,  
an your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

(Isaiah 49:34-25, 26)

VII. God came into creation. Jesus, the Son of God, was born on Christmas Day. We call this the Incarnation. This was not some mere birth of a baby. This was not some minor thing. Remembering

that Satan had made this world his kingdom, this is nothing less than an invasion of his dominion that makes D-Day look like child's play.

While gentle silence enveloped all things,  
and night in its swift course was not half gone,  
your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne  
into the midst of a land doomed,  
a stern warrior. (Wisdom 18:14-15, NRSVCE)

1 John 3:8, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." God came into this world disguised as a child. The devil did not know who he was fighting. And when the boy grew up, he outright declares war on evil, on sin, on death, on Satan:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring glad tidings to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."  
(Luke 4:18-19)

#### VIII. The Cross.

- A. The only way God is nailed to a cross is if he wanted it to happen. Why would he do this?
  1. Jesus is showing us the love of the Father.
  2. Jesus is making atonement for us. – there is a distance, an obstacle between God and man and something must remove this obstacle
  3. Jesus is going to war to rescue us. – Jesus appeared weak. Satan thought he could win. He didn't think Jesus was actually God, but Satan isn't an idiot and knows he doesn't stand a chance against God.
  4. Read the Patristics stuff on pp. 114-7
- B. Through the Cross, through Christ's suffering, Satan was beaten at his own game and his kingdom was destroyed. Jesus waited for the exact right moment to ambush Satan and destroy him. Christ came to rescue us. To bind the evil one so we might be free.
- C. In the Cross, The Victory is complete. Jesus has: Humiliated the enemy, destroyed death, transferred us to his kingdom, given us access to the Father, recreated us, rendered sin impotent, given us authority over the enemy, and sent us on a mission to get his world back
- D. In his Passion, Christ destroys sin and death and paves the road to eternal life for all who might follow the path Jesus made for us to follow.
- E. We call this the Paschal Mystery: the Suffering, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the central mystery of our faith, but this mystery is hard to accept. Even the scriptures attest to this. 1 Corinthians "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1:18) and "we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles," (1:23) What is it?

I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures;  
that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures;  
that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.  
After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.  
After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.  
Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. (15:3-8)  
If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised.  
And if Christ has not been raised, then empty [too] is our preaching; empty, too, your faith.  
Then we are also false witnesses to God, because we testified against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if in fact the dead are not raised.  
For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised,  
and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins.  
Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.  
If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all. (15:13-19)

## Response

- IX. When we know the story, the love God has for us, the situation that we were in, and what God did to save us, only one question remains: what am I going to do about it?
- A. Gratitude
    1. Worship – Bob Dylan “you gotta serve somebody.” – for who he is
    2. Praise and Thanksgiving – for what he has done
  - B. Surrender – have faith in God and ask what he wants for *you* – personally
  - C. Courage – this is Good News. It should be shared. God chose Christians to do that through words and actions, allowing the signs of our faith to speak loudly
    1. Care of the sick
    2. Care for the poor
    3. Treatment of women – actually caring about their dignity and not just what they can do for powerful men, which is how they were treated before Christianity, and if we look at the world around us, we are just being dishonest about the fact that we are back to treating women like garbage again. It hurts my heart to see it.
    4. Unity / Universal extent – the Gospel is for *everyone*, not just the elite or a certain group
    5. Forgiveness – the Christian martyrs prayed for their killers!

## Wrap-up & Announcements

You would not believe how much more I wanted to say about all of these things today. This is just the tip of the iceberg. The Gospel message is incredible once we actually understand it. The kerygma, the core of the Gospel, lies at the heart of Christianity. God created us good. We were enslaved by evil. He came down from Heaven to save us by utterly destroying the power of sin and death over us, offering us eternal life. We just have to have the courage to do whatever it takes to follow him.

## Schedule

Date Time Topic

Sunday, October 29, 2023 at 2pm: What is Religion about? Why should I care?

Sunday, November 5, 2023 at 2pm: What makes Christianity different?

Sunday, November 12, 2023 at 2pm: The Kerygma; The Paschal Mystery

Sunday, November 19, 2023 at 2pm: Jesus!

Sunday, December 3, 2023 at 2pm: Where does the Bible come from? (topics: Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, Inspiration, Divine Revelation)

Sunday, December 10, 2023 at 2pm: Catholic Stuff You Should Know (topics: Prayer, Going to Mass, Importance of Sunday, What's a Catechumen?)