

FLAME CATECHIST HANDOUT

Week 8 – 12/5/2021

Confronting Contradictions



OBJECTIVES

- To acknowledge that contradiction is part of every facet of our lives, including our faith life.
- That being aware of contradictions can be very unsettling and create in us a need to resolve those contradictions.
- Contradictions are part of the larger process of transition (see the PPT on transition to understand the process).
- To help teens see that wrestling with contradiction can serve as a catalyst in discovering a deeper more complete truth.
- To explore with teens that Religious contradictions pose unique issues
 1. Contradictions fuel doubt and disillusionment
 2. Are often seen as indications of hypocrisy and inauthenticity (both of which are key factors in the abandonment of religious faith among young people)
 3. Raises questions about the foundation of religious truth and divine revelation.
- To help teens identify the religious contradictions they experience and explore with them how that affects their personal faith life.
- To again assure teens that having disagreements with particular interpretations of Scriptural passages and Church teaching is the norm not the exception.

OVERVIEW

1. 4:00-5:00pm - Mass
2. 5:15-6:45pm – Small Group Lesson Plan/Dismissal

LESSON COMPONENTS

- A. **Community Building** (10-15 min)
- B. **Shared experiences by adults and teens** (35-40 min)
- C. **Catholic Teaching/Insight** (15 min)
- D. **Scripture & Prayer** (10 min)
- E. **Putting Faith Into Action** (5 min)

Announcements

CATECHIST NOTES

Why discuss this?

1. Contradiction is part of everyone's life and occurs in every part of one's life. Wrestling with contradiction causes us to be anxious. Knowing how to cope with contradiction lessens that anxiety
2. Contradictions make us uneasy but are not without value.
 - Jesus himself was seen as a contradiction in his own time
 - Christ's church is called to be a contradictory sign
3. Evaluating apparent contradictions can serve as a catalyst in discovering a deeper more complete truth.
4. "A profound question that confronts religious thought in general is whether or not the idea of "change" may be reconciled with the "eternal" and "perennial" truth" (*Hossein Kamali*, Islamic scholar).
5. Critics have long cited the contradictions of religion as indications of insincerity or possible hypocrisy. Based on my research on the psychology behind religious faith, however, I suggest otherwise... contradictions in religion are not theological errors but efforts to recognize the "varieties of religious experiences."
By embracing contradictory values, religion is teaching that God is for everyone. Inclusion is the greater value. Religion is saying that our common humanity and God trump all that divides us. (*Steven Reiss*, Clinical psychologist)

A. Community Building (15 min)

- If you have a regular activity you use to begin class, do that.
- If you are looking for something new try this exercise

What a Web We Weave

Engage in an eye-opening group affirmation activity for 15 to 60 teens, which will assist in making individuals feel that they are not alone in their desires for a better self. All that is required is a large ball of yarn and scissors. The group assembles itself into a circle. The first individual states a positive affirmation such as "I am friendly and outgoing" and tosses the ball of yarn to someone across from him, keeping a grasp on the end of the yarn. The next person relays an affirmation about himself such as "I am fit and healthy" and tosses the yarn back across the circle and so forth until a giant web forms.

B. Shared experiences by adults and teens (40 min)

- Direct teens to TH p. 1. Define contradiction and spend some time talking about how inconsistent elements in our lives can lead to conflict and call for change. Make sure you let them know we all experience these inconsistencies within ourselves, our families, our friends... If the teens are willing to share some of the inconsistencies they struggle with, have them do so.
- Then explore with them how recognizing and dealing with these inconsistencies can lead to growth and new understandings (as well as helping them be more patient with the inconsistencies they see in others).
- Explore the religious contradictions with which the teens wrestle. Have them identify these contradictions.

C. Catholic Teaching/Insight (10 min)

- Direct teens to TH p. 2 Choose one or two of the optical illusions given to talk about. Share with them that what we see (our perspective) is shaped by our experience and contexts. That what we know, feel, experience helps us create an interpretive framework. We use this framework in our search for meaning.
- Explore with the teens how our interpretation of things can and should grow and develop. How our interpretation of things can be impacted negatively by our lack of experience or knowledge, bias, not being open to new ways of seeing/feeling/acting, misunderstanding certain pieces of evidence or the context (misreading non-verbal communication, placing a "tone" on a text, ascribing a motive to another's words or actions without real evidence...)

CATECHIST NOTES

What a Web We Weave

In addition to the affirmation, side of this exercise the web created provides a useful symbol of Church. The purpose of the faith community is connect believers with God through each other. When someone drops out of the web, the integrity of the web is damaged. The same thing is true in the faith community. In addition, religious faith is much more like a web, than a textbook. Religious faith has more dimensions than simply assent to a set of intellectual propositions.

**If you feel your group knows each other well enough you can have the person throwing the yarn affirm the person they are throwing to.

Wrestling with Religious

Contradictions. On TH p. 1 there are some common contradictions among believers. Before the teens identify specific contradictions they deal with, you or your peers might share some of your own and how you are dealing with them.

** You can have teens work in pairs or small groups to identify their specific contradictions.

CATECHIST NOTES

The Scripture text for this lesson gives evidence of the diversity of understandings in the early Church, chronicles the disagreement between Paul and Peter over the Eucharist in Antioch and how Paul addresses the contradiction in Peter's behavior

Cephas – Greek for Peter

James – the leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem. These were Jewish Christians, strict observers of Jewish law, who advocated that Gentile Christians should become Jewish before being baptized as Christians.

Antioch – the largest of the early Christian communities that included both Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Barnabas – a leader in the Christian community in Antioch.

At that time, a circumcised Jewish Christian could not sit at the same table with a Gentile Christian without falling into impurity. However in Antioch, Jews and Gentile Christians ate together, (the Eucharistic at this time involved a whole meal, not just the ritual sharing of the Body and Blood of Christ). Paul saw separating the community, especially at the Eucharist, the height of hypocrisy.

Peter often ate with Gentiles in Antioch, but on this visit members of the Jerusalem community were present and he did not want to be seen as impure so he would not sit with the Gentiles.

Paul calls him out. Eventually the issue is settled in favor of the unity of the Christian community.

- Reiterate that Catholicism is a global Church, with 1.2 billion members and a 2,000-year-old history. This is a complex reality and some of the contradictions we face as Catholics arise from this complexity.
- Our diversity is a gift from the Holy Spirit. As a community of faith we are **not** called to uniformity, we are called to unity within diversity. When we get uncomfortable with diversity and begin to seek conformity, we become less than who we are meant to be.
- Often (not always) our disagreement with what is revealed in Scripture or taught by the Church has to do with a particular interpretation of the passage or teaching.
- Direct teens to **TH p. 3** – Religious Dissent is a summary of the entire lesson.

D. Scripture & Prayer (10 min)

- Have the teens look up Galatians 2:11-14 in their Bibles.
- Ask someone to read the text

Galatians 2:11-14

And when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he clearly was wrong. For, until some people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to draw back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the circumcised. And the rest of the Jews also acted hypocritically along with him, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not on the right road in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of all, "If you, though a Jew, are living like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

- How does Peter (Cephas) deal with the contradiction of treating Gentiles as second-class citizens in the Church?
- Why does he do it? (succumbs to the pressure of certain Jewish Christians)
- Whom else does he influence? (Barnabas)
- How does Paul deal with the contradiction? (Choosing Jesus' gospel standard of welcoming all at table over Jewish law)
- What can we learn from this passage about how to handle such religious contradictions?

E. Putting Faith into Action (5 min)

- Direct teens to **TH p 4**. Ask them to write or share with the group their response to one of the two questions provided.