

Thinking Like Jesus
ReCatechism 1
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As we start off tonight, I want to tell you all about a young girl that I was reading about a few nights ago. At a very young age, this young girl (because she had no money, no support, nothing at all), became a prostitute. Although society is supposed to take care of its vulnerable citizens, it chose to forget this person – even branding her as an “embarrassment”. She was an outcast.

Yet, one day, this girl had enough. She made a life-changing decision – a decision that changed how she was seen, how she saw herself, how she would be for the rest of her life. Through the help of one person that believed she could be so much more, she began to change. She even went so far as to take everything she had and give it to the poor. She dedicated the rest of her life to God (even became a nun!) and finally passed away in peace.

The person who I’ve just talked about to you all is the Saint that we are celebrating today, **St. Pelagia**. Her example, along with the example of many of our Saints, is one that makes you think about life, about faith, about trust. She became a different person because she decided to **THINK** differently about life. She chose to **THINK like Jesus**.

A lot of us, when we hear we have to **THINK** like Jesus, might find it an impossible task – the classic “I can be a good person, but I can never be like Jesus... that’s just too much”. Yet, it’s one of those lifelong commitments, a lifelong journey.

To **THINK** like Jesus is to follow five simple steps:

T – Try and get to know Him

H – Hate the sin, not the sinner (forgiveness, God is love, η πόρνη και ο Κύριος)

I – Ignite Faith every day! (Example of St. Peter)

N – Not be phased by life's difficulties (H1N1, etc. and the “difficulties” leading to the Cross)

K – Keep remembering what He told us: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

So... let’s begin with **T** – **Try and get to know Him**

A picture that comes to my mind is a famous Bible reading. The disciples and Christ were in this city, Caesaria Phillipi. They sat down, rested from the day’s

journey. So, in classic “Jesus fashion”, He asked them a simple question: “Who do the people say that I Am?”

Now, the people of the time that Jesus was alive had their guesses on who Jesus was. Some said He was John the Baptist. Others guessed He was Elijah or one of the Prophets. So, Jesus went a step further: “So... who do you say that I Am?”

This is a question that is very important. It’s the centre of what we are going to talk about not only for the next sessions, but for the rest of our lives as Christians. Not knowing Him means we make Jesus a kind of “hollow figure” – He has no personality, nothing to make Him unique. He’s like a person who’s “featured” on a sitcom – we see him but don’t really care to find out about Him more than we need to.

Even throughout history, people have portrayed Jesus in so many lights. Early Christian heresies portrayed Him as a “spirit”, a “ghost”, even a “non-human God” or a “non-divine human”. Some see Him as a good teacher, even as a “good magician” or “soothsayer.” Other faiths and cultures see Him as a prophet, a wise rabbi, a deranged lunatic, a fraud. Some portray Him as a philosopher, a seeker of social justice, or a “nice guy who could even make mistakes.”

When Jesus asked that question at Caesaria Phillipi, St. Peter (one of His disciples) spoke up: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” He is not *just* a simple man. He is not *just* a wise teacher. He is **definitely not** a “ghost or spirit”. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

His Name, *Jesus*, literally means “the One who is Victorious, the One who saves.” His title, the Christ, means “the Anointed One”. As the “New Adam”, He did right what Adam failed to do: He was obedient to the Will of God. He is the Messiah, the Saviour; yet, He is the Suffering Servant – who suffered for humanity. As the uncontainable and limitless God, He was contained and limited in the womb of a woman! While God does not feel thirst, hunger, pain and exhaustion, He subjected Himself to these things. As Perfect God and Perfect Man, He had a personal relationship with His creation, whom He saved from the tyranny of the devil.

From its beginnings in Jerusalem, the Church educated its people about Jesus Christ. Yet, some people – for various reasons – decided to alter these believes. The Church, throughout its history, decided to call “Councils” or “Synods” in order to ‘set straight’ the official teaching about who Jesus truly is – and dispel any rumours or false teachings (called ‘heresies’). The Creed, the Symbol of our Faith we recite every Sunday during the Divine Liturgy (and at other services), tells us the basics about Jesus Christ.

This is a beginning about finding out who He Is. I say a “beginning”, because our quest, our journey, in finding out “*who Jesus Is*” is one that is, as we said, a life-

long journey. Every Christian should begin to *think like Jesus* at baptism, with parents, godparents and family helping them to love Him every moment of their lives.

Question: What is the role of the Godparent in Religious Education?

As we begin to learn about Him, we move on to the next letter,

H – Hate the sin, not the sinner.

If there is one thing that we have seen throughout Jesus' life, we see that He is the Source of Forgiveness. A famous passage I remember is found in the Gospel of John.

TEXT: “The scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?’ This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, ‘He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.’ And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, ‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’”

St. John the Theologian, when he wrote to the early Christians, said “God is love... [so], if you say you love God and hate your neighbour, you are a liar.” Pretty blunt, St. John the Theologian is. Yet, he is right. “How can you say that you love God, Whom you haven't seen, and yet hate your brother or sister who you see every day?”

THINKing like Jesus forces us to really sit down and examine what sin is. We say the word ‘sin’ all the time, but many of us don't sit and talk about it.

The word *αμαρτία* literally means “I miss the mark”. Think of a person trying to hit the target and missing the centre (or, if you're like me, missing the entire target)... ☺ “Sin”, therefore, is not reaching your target. It's sort of – no, it's *exactly* – like those bracelets say: WWJD? (**What Would Jesus Do?**)

We get upset with our brothers and sisters. We lose our temper with people who are annoying us for some reason. We feel cheated because the other person got

the promotion. We feel things need to be “our way”. Yet, when we see our actions (all of us – from the greatest clergyman to the last lay person), do we really measure up? Do we hit the target?

The target, of course, is to be like Christ. It sounds very difficult, but that’s why being a Christian is not a 100-metre dash, but a marathon. We begin at baptism (some of us from infants, some of us later on in life) to journey towards Christ. We go through various trials and tribulations in our lives. Just like St. Pelagia did in her life, we realize that **sin** is the thing that needs to be hated. The sinner is a person who we should pray for. It is difficult so many times to take a look at the person who has wronged us and pray for them, let alone to love them. It is difficult for all of us – yet, that’s why God is so patient with us. He realizes we’re all weak. He realizes that it takes time to deal with people and what they’ve done to us. And He wants us to be with Him... so He gives us that time to reconcile.

Having said that, all of us should **detest** sin. We detest sin because it keeps us away from Christ. It is *sin* that drags us away from goodness. It is the *sin* that we commit that breaks up relationships. It is sin that, quite frankly, makes the devil happy.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, one of the theological “brains” known as a “Cappadocian Father”, says to us about sin: “The origin of evil can only be understood as the absence of virtue. If light is removed, darkness ensues; if light is present, darkness does not exist.” So, all we have to do is hate sin... by loving our neighbour. This helps us in attaining our goal in life: being just like Christ. He says it Himself: **“be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”**

Here is the context of that verse:

Matthew 5:43 **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons and daughters of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

This verse ushers us into our next letter:

I – Ignite our Faith every day!

This process of “being perfect” can be seen in one of the most famous Saints our Church has, St. Peter.

St. Peter the Apostle was a disciple of Christ. His first meeting with Him was quite unique – having Jesus “provide” him with a multitude of fish that his boat started to sink.

From this miracle, he and his brother Andrew followed Christ. After he confessed Jesus to the Christ, our Lord gave him the name Peter, because the Church would be built on his statement of Faith (that is, that Christ is the Son of God). Yet, Peter sinned and denied Christ three times before Jesus’ death, to which he asked forgiveness. Jesus forgave him after His resurrection and Peter became not only an Apostle, but the Chief of the Apostles. He was crucified upside down in the year 66 or 68 AD by Nero.

As you can see, Peter wasn’t “always with Jesus”, faithful 100% of his life. He was a human being, he sinned, he asked for forgiveness. When he received forgiveness, he brought so many people to Faith. Why? Because after Peter asked for forgiveness, he began to THINK like Jesus. He ignited his faith and knew that he needed to go to the well for water every so often (that is, he knew he needed to go to Jesus for inspiration, to serve as his example).

And it wasn’t just St. Peter. So many of our Saints have been like this! A Saint is a *sinner who has repented*. So many of our Saints were prostitutes, murderers, gang leaders... and yet, because God loves us so much, He forgave them...not because they sat and said “oh, I’m sorry, God”, but because they asked for forgiveness with their hearts. Their faith was set aflame with His love, and they chose to accept it in their hearts. We’re invited to do the same... and we can do it in simple ways.

Personally, I’d like to propose something: we all make it a point to follow what we put up here. We need to “talk the talk and walk the walk”, as they say. One thing that I’d like to propose we do is this: *there are so many people that are hungry in this world. There are many people living in poverty all over the globe. Presently in Canada, there are reports that the poverty rate for adults and the elderly is 6%, yet 15% of children live in poverty.*

*I’m proposing that we, at **Re-Catechism**, help out our brothers and sisters in need. The next session, on October 22nd, is “Offering like Jesus”. Jesus offered Himself for us – and we need to ignite our Faith by offering as He did... so, in two weeks, bring what you can (non-perishable food, clothing or toys) and we’ll give it to children and families with needs. Is there anything else anyone wants to suggest? Let’s see if we can make a difference this year and re-ignite our Faith!*

And now, on to N – **Not be phased by life's difficulties**

A big problem in today’s world is the possible outbreak of the H1N1 virus. It’s something that has gripped the entire world, with many deaths attributed to this disease. We all need to be careful in our lives with this and with so many other

things that are out there. Yet, it's almost as if it's "written in the rule book" that when something like this comes around (or SARS, a few years ago), the storm clouds of doubt come up when it comes to Faith.

When SARS began, the Orthodox Church was criticized by the mainstream media – and even by its own people – that it gave Holy Communion in the same way it has been for centuries. Some people will say that the 'silver spoon' (the *lavida*) put inside the Chalice will be sanitized, because the Holy Communion still maintains the properties of alcohol. Some will argue that there is a real threat because we don't know what will happen. When I was speaking with my friend, Fr. Ted Paraskevopoulos in Winnipeg, about this, I think he said it perfectly: "It's besides the point."

During St. Peter's life, he saw Jesus walking on water in the midst of a storm. Jesus said to the disciples "it is I, do not fear." Yet, Peter didn't believe and said to Jesus, "if it is You, Lord, bid me to come out to the water." Jesus did it. He came out on the waters...and what happened? Peter **lived** this miracle for himself and still he doubted because he saw the storm clouds. Peter began to sink because of his disbelief and he cried out, "Save me, Lord!" Jesus saved him but told him it was *because* of his disbelief that he was sinking.

It's the same with us: when things are great we choose to say "everything is great, we're Orthodox and proud of it" (either to others or by joining groups on Facebook and twittering "XPICTOC ANECTH" for our friends to see). Yet, when the storm clouds do come like H1N1, SARS or something else, we choose to run away. All of us – at one time or another – are at the crossroads of, basically, denying our Faith. And Jesus tells us something very profound in Revelation (everyone's favourite Biblical book ;) ... He says that if you have lukewarm faith (you're neither hot nor cold), "I will spit you out of my mouth"! It's something that's difficult for us to fathom, but Jesus is so loving that He respects our free will, that gift given by Him, to make choices in our lives. If He was a dictator, He would say "it's my way and that's it"... but He lets us choose... so, it's up to us to not be phased by life's difficulties.

So... In the end, we've just begun to scratch the surface on THINKing like Jesus. To THINK like Jesus, we need to...

T – Try and get to know Him

H – Hate the sin, not the sinner (forgiveness, God is love, η πόρνη και ο Κύριος)

I – Ignite Faith every day! (Example of St. Peter)

N – Not be phased by life's difficulties (H1N1, etc. and the "difficulties" leading to the Cross)

And FINALLY,

K – Keep remembering what He told us: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

This verse of Scripture is recited during the Agape Vespers, on Pascha in the morning. I never paid much attention to it until Archbishop Demetrios of America came to Canada this past May. His words have changed how I see this verse of Scripture, so I want to leave you tonight with what he said about this:

It is from a text...which belongs to the post-Resurrection appearances of Christ....

“Jesus said to [the disciples] again, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, even as I send you.’” Now, my beloved people, this is the most dramatic phrases ever heard from Jesus Christ. As the Father has sent *Him*, He sends *us* to continue His work! The Father sends Him.... God the Father sends God the Son, and now Jesus does the same to us. “I Am now sending you, as the Father sent me.” There is no possibility of a higher call and higher sending than this. If we only had this from the Gospel, it would make us tremble with fear, trembling and joy.

It might sound difficult, but it’s a call that we all accepted at the moment of our baptism and continue to accept today.

We’re all called to be disciples of Christ and, thinking like Him, bringing the entire world back to Him, back to the Kingdom of God. THINKing like Jesus will take us “from glory to glory”. From the earth to Heaven. From death to life. From being slaves to sin to becoming sons and daughters of the Most High.

Thank you.