

OCIA Retreat

Grace and the Theological Virtues

Faith, Hope, and Love

Participant Guide

JP2 Parish

Today's Schedule

Schedule at a Glance

Time	Activity	Location
8:00 AM	Welcome & Introduction	Parish Hall
8:30 AM	Rosary	Sanctuary
9:00 AM	Mass	Sanctuary
10:00 AM	Session 1: Grace	Parish Hall → Sanctuary → Parish Hall
11:15 AM	Session 2: Faith	Parish Hall → Sanctuary → Parish Hall
12:30 PM	Lunch	Parish Hall
1:00 PM	Session 3: Hope	Parish Hall → Sanctuary → Parish Hall
2:15 PM	Session 4: Love	Parish Hall → Sanctuary → Parish Hall
3:30 PM	Closing Session	Sanctuary
4:30 PM	Retreat Ends	—

Session Format

Each session follows this pattern:

1. **Teaching** (30 min) — Parish Hall
 2. **Prayer with Jesus** (25 min) — Sanctuary
 3. **Group Discussion** (20 min) — Parish Hall
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Key Scripture

"So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love." — 1 Corinthians 13:13
(NABRE)

Session 0: Opening Foundation - Participant Notes

What Is a Virtue?

"So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love." — 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NABRE)

CCC 1803: *"A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself."*

Two Kinds of Virtue

1. Human Virtues - Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance - Other Human Virtues: Patience, Humility, Chastity, Generosity, Kindness, Gratitude, Honesty, Compassion - Can be acquired through human effort and practice - Reach full perfection only when animated by grace and the theological virtues - Rooted in the theological virtues (CCC 1812)

2. Theological Virtues - Faith, Hope, and Love (Charity) - *Infused* by God into our souls—He is their author and source - Enable us to love God and neighbor - We receive them, cooperate with them, and grow in them through grace

Why "Theological"? (CCC 1812)

1. God is their ORIGIN - God infuses them directly into our souls - We don't obtain them through willpower—they are pure gift

2. God is their OBJECT - Faith believes *in God* - Hope trusts *in God's promises* - Love loves *God* above all else

3. God is their MOTIVE - We practice them *because of who God is* - Not to earn rewards or avoid punishment

CCC 1813: *"The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life."*

The Pattern

God acts first. We respond.

Why These Three?

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NABRE): *"So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."*

- **Faith** will become sight
 - **Hope** will become possession
 - **Love** will remain forever, because God IS Love
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Why We Start with Grace

Without grace, the theological virtues are impossible.

Session	Focus
1. Grace	God gives us His life (the foundation)
2. Faith	We believe in the God who gives (our first response)
3. Hope	We trust in what God promises (confidence in His faithfulness)
4. Love	We participate in God's own life (the goal of everything)

Session 1: Grace - God's Gift of Himself

Participant Notes

Central Truth

God gives his own life and friendship to us. We call this gift grace. We do not earn or deserve God's grace. Grace allows us to become God's adopted children and to respond to his abundant love.

Key Scripture

Ephesians 2:4-10 — *"By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God."*

John 15:5 — *"I am the vine, you are the branches... apart from me you can do nothing."*

2 Corinthians 12:9 — *"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."*

Lesson Outline

1. What Grace Actually Is

- Grace is not a thing—it's **God's own divine life** shared with us
- We were dead in sin—dead people can't save themselves

- Grace is **pure gift**—we can't earn it, only receive it
- Grace makes us **God's adopted children**

CCC 1996: *"Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God."*

My Notes:

2. How Grace Works in Us

- Grace isn't just a one-time gift—it's an **ongoing relationship**
- Like a branch connected to the vine, we receive life **continuously** from Christ
- The sacraments are the **primary channels** through which grace flows
- We can **cooperate** with grace or **resist** it—God respects our freedom

Two Kinds of Grace:

Type	What It Is
Sanctifying Grace	God's life dwelling in us (received at Baptism, restored in Confession)
Actual Grace	God's help in specific moments to do good and avoid evil

My Notes:

3. Why This Changes Everything

- St. Paul begged God to remove his "thorn in the flesh"
- God's answer: "*My grace is sufficient*"—not "I'll fix your problem" but "**I am enough**"
- Grace transforms us **from the inside out**
- We become capable of things we could **never do on our own**

The Stakes:

- Sanctifying grace can be **lost** through mortal sin
- It is **restored** through the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- We **increase** in grace by prayer, the sacraments, and acts of love

My Notes:

Key Takeaway

Grace is the **foundation** of everything else. Faith, hope, and love are only possible because God **first gives us his grace**.

The question isn't "*Am I good enough for God?*"

The question is "*Will I receive what God's gift of His self?*"

My Response

One thing I want to remember about this lesson:

Prayer for Grace

*Lord Jesus, I cannot save myself. I cannot transform myself. I cannot earn your love. But I can receive it. Open my heart to your grace. Help me to stop striving and start receiving. Apart from you, I can do nothing. With you, all things are possible. **Amen.***

Session 1 Devotional: Resting in God's Grace

15 Minutes with Jesus

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ." — Ephesians 2:4-5 (NABRE)

The Gift You Cannot Earn

You are sitting in the midst of Love Himself.

The God who created the universe—who holds every star in place, who knows every hair on your head—is here. And He is not here to judge you, to fix you, or to demand something from you. He is here to give Himself to you.

This is grace.

You have learned that God exists, that He is Trinity—a communion of love. You have seen His covenant plan unfold through history, culminating in Jesus Christ. You have discovered the Church, the sacraments, the Mass. You know *about* God.

But grace is how you come to know God *personally*. Grace is not a thing God gives. Grace is God giving *Himself*. Right now, in this moment, the infinite God is pouring out His divine life toward you—not because you've earned it, not because you deserve it, but simply because He loves you.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux understood this when she wrote:

"It is not because I have been preserved from mortal sin that I lift up my heart to God in trust and love. I feel that even if I had on my conscience every crime one could commit, I would lose nothing of my confidence. Heartbroken with repentance, I would simply throw myself into my Savior's arms."

Can you receive this? Can you let go of the need to earn, to prove, to be worthy—and simply receive?

Grace and the Virtues: The Foundation of Everything

Today we begin a journey through the theological virtues: **Faith, Hope, and Love**. But before we can believe, before we can hope, before we can love—we must first receive.

Grace is the foundation.

- **Faith** is possible because grace opens our eyes to see God.
- **Hope** is possible because grace assures us of God's promises.
- **Love** is possible because grace pours God's own love into our hearts.

Without grace, we cannot take a single step toward God. But *with* grace, everything becomes possible.

St. Augustine, who knew the depths of his own weakness, wrote:

"God does not command the impossible, but in commanding He admonishes you to do what you can, and to ask for what you cannot do, and He helps you so that you can do it."

You are not alone. You have never been alone. God's grace surrounds you, sustains you, and empowers you for everything He calls you to.

Reflection Questions

Sit quietly with Jesus. Let these questions rest in your heart. You don't need to answer them—just let them open you to God's presence.

1. Where have I been trying to earn God's love?

What would it mean to stop striving and simply receive?

My thoughts:

2. What weakness am I ashamed of?

Can I bring it to Jesus right now and hear Him say, "My grace is sufficient for you"?

My thoughts:

3. How is God inviting me to trust Him more deeply?

Grace is the beginning—faith, hope, and love will follow.

My thoughts:

A Prayer of Surrender

Pray this slowly, from your heart:

Lord Jesus, I come to You just as I am.

*I have nothing to offer You but my need. I cannot earn Your love. I cannot deserve Your grace.
But I can receive.*

Help me to receive.

*Open my hands that have been clenched in striving. Open my heart that has been closed in
shame. Open my soul to the flood of Your mercy.*

*I believe that Your grace is enough. I believe that Your love is real. I believe that You are here,
right now, giving Yourself to me.*

Jesus, I trust in You.

Amen.

Rest in His Presence

Now, set aside this booklet.

You have reflected. You have prayed. But the most important thing is simply to *be* with Jesus.

He is here—truly present in the Blessed Sacrament before you. You don't need words. You don't need to figure anything out. Just rest in His presence. Let Him look at you with love. Speak to Him from your heart—whatever comes naturally. Or simply be still and know that He is God.

Remain here in silence until the bell rings.

When you hear the bell, pray the closing prayer below, then return quietly to the Parish Hall.

Closing Prayer: The Anima Christi

This ancient prayer, beloved by St. Ignatius of Loyola, is a perfect way to close your time with Jesus. It asks Christ to sanctify us with His grace—the very gift we have been reflecting on.

Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save me. Blood of Christ, inebriate me. Water from the side of Christ, wash me. Passion of Christ, strengthen me. O good Jesus, hear me. Within your wounds, hide me. Permit me not to be separated from you. From the wicked foe, defend me. At the hour of my death, call me and bid me come to you, that with your saints I may praise you forever and ever. ***Amen.***

We do not walk this journey alone. The saints who have gone before us intercede for us. Ask for their prayers:

*Holy Mary, Mother of God, **pray for us.***

*St. John Paul II, **pray for us.***

*St. Thérèse of Lisieux, **pray for us.***

*St. Augustine, **pray for us.***

*St. Ignatius of Loyola, **pray for us.***

*All holy men and women, **pray for us.***

As You Leave

While making the Sign of the Cross, pray:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Thank you, Lord. I receive Your grace. Amen.

You don't need to feel anything special. You don't need to have had a profound experience. Grace works whether we feel it or not.

Go in peace. The journey continues.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God." —
Ephesians 2:8 (NABRE)

Session 2: Faith - Believing in Love

Participant Notes

Central Truth

We believe because of the authority of God who reveals. Our response is a gift of his grace. We must remain steadfast in faith to see God.

Key Scripture

John 14:6 — *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Mark 9:24 — *"I do believe, help my unbelief!"*

Hebrews 11:1, 6 — *"Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen... without faith it is impossible to please him."*

Lesson Outline

1. Faith Is Personal Trust, Not Just Information

- Jesus doesn't say "believe these facts about me"—he says **"believe IN me"**
- Faith is **personal trust** in a Person, not just intellectual agreement
- *"Let not your hearts be troubled"*—faith brings **peace**, not anxiety

- Jesus claims to be **THE way**—not A way

CCC 1814: *"Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us... because he is truth itself."*

My Notes:

2. Faith Is a Gift We Must Choose to Receive

- The father's prayer: *"I believe; help my unbelief!"*—the most **honest** prayer
- Faith is a **gift from God**—we can't manufacture it
- But we must **choose** to receive it and cooperate with it
- **Doubt** is not the opposite of faith—**refusal** is the opposite of faith

How Faith Grows: - Prayer—asking God for more faith - The sacraments—especially Eucharist and Confession - Scripture and the teaching of the Church - Community with other believers - Acting on the faith we have

How Faith Weakens: - Neglecting prayer and the sacraments - Surrounding ourselves only with unbelief - Refusing to act on what we know to be true - Letting other things become more important than God

My Notes:

3. Faith Is the Foundation for Everything Else

- Faith is **assurance** and **conviction**—not wishful thinking
- We believe in things we cannot see—but that doesn't mean they're **not real**
- *"Without faith it is impossible to please God"*—this is sobering
- Faith is the **door** through which we enter relationship with God

The Connection to Love:

- Faith is not the end—it's the **beginning**
- Faith opens us to **receive** God's love
- Faith leads to hope, and hope leads to love
- *"Faith working through love"* (Galatians 5:6)

My Notes:

Key Takeaway

Faith is saying **"yes"** to God—yes to his existence, yes to his revelation, yes to his love.

It's not a blind leap into the dark; it's a **trusting step toward the Light**.

My Response

One thing I want to remember about this lesson:

Act of Faith

*O my God, I firmly believe that you are one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe that your divine Son became man and died for our sins, and that he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the holy Catholic Church teaches, because you have revealed them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. **Amen.***

Session 2 Devotional: Saying Yes to God

15 Minutes with Jesus

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" — John 14:6 (NABRE)

The Leap That Isn't Blind

You have been on a journey. You have learned that God exists, that He answers the problem of evil with love. You have encountered the Trinity, traced God's covenant plan, and met Jesus Christ—the Answer Incarnate. You have discovered the Church, Scripture, Tradition, the Mass, the saints.

You know so much more than when you started. And yet—knowing is not the same as believing.

Faith is not pretending to be certain when you're not. Faith is not checking your brain at the door. Faith is responding to a God who has already reached out to you—a God who reveals Himself through Scripture and Tradition, through the Church, through the sacraments—and waits for your response.

St. John Henry Newman described his own journey this way:

"Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt."

You can have questions. You can struggle. You can wrestle. That's not the opposite of faith—that's often how faith grows. What matters is that you keep turning toward the One who created you, who loves you, who is calling you to a life in Him.

Faith Built on Grace

In our first session, we reflected on grace—God's free gift of Himself. Now we see that faith is our response to that gift.

Grace comes first. Always. God reveals Himself before we seek Him. God loves us before we love Him. God calls us before we answer.

Faith is simply saying *yes* to what God has already done.

- **Grace** is God reaching out to us.
- **Faith** is us reaching back.
- **Hope** will be trusting where that relationship leads.
- **Love** will be living fully in that relationship.

Without grace, we could not believe. But grace has been given. The question now is: Will you believe?

St. Augustine, after years of running from God, finally surrendered:

"Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside... You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness."

God is calling. He is breaking through. Faith is hearing that call and responding.

Reflection Questions

Sit quietly with Jesus. Let these questions rest in your heart.

1. What has God done to reveal Himself to me?

A person? An experience? A longing that won't go away?

My thoughts:

2. Where do I struggle to believe?

Can I bring that struggle honestly to Jesus right now?

My thoughts:

3. What would it mean for me to say "yes" to God today?

Not a perfect yes. Not a certain yes. Just an honest yes.

My thoughts:

A Prayer for Faith

Pray this slowly, from your heart:

Lord Jesus, I want to believe.

I bring You my doubts, my questions, my uncertainties. I bring You the parts of me that struggle to trust. I bring You my whole self—not just the parts that feel ready.

You have revealed Yourself to me in ways I'm only beginning to understand. Help me to see. Help me to hear. Help me to respond.

I believe, Lord. Help my unbelief.

Amen.

Traditional Prayer: Act of Faith

This ancient prayer expresses the heart of what it means to believe. Pray it slowly, making each phrase your own.

O my God, I firmly believe that you are one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I believe that your divine Son became man and died for our sins, and that he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe these and all the truths which the holy Catholic Church teaches, because you have revealed them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

Amen.

Rest in His Presence

Now, set aside this booklet.

You have reflected. You have prayed. But the most important thing is simply to *be* with Jesus.

He is here—truly present in the Blessed Sacrament before you. You don't need to have all the answers. You don't need perfect faith. Just be with the One who is calling you. Speak to Him from your heart—your doubts, your hopes, your desire to believe. Or simply be still and let Him speak to you.

Remain here in silence until the bell rings.

When you hear the bell, pray the closing prayer below, then return quietly to the Parish Hall.

Closing Prayer: The Anima Christi

Ask Christ to deepen your faith as you pray:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save me. Blood of Christ, inebriate me. Water from the side of Christ, wash me. Passion of Christ, strengthen me. O good Jesus, hear me. Within your wounds, hide me. Permit me not to be separated from you. From the wicked foe, defend me. At the hour of my death, call me and bid me come to you, that with your saints I may praise you forever and ever. ***Amen.***

We do not walk this journey alone. The saints who have gone before us intercede for us. Ask for their prayers:

*Holy Mary, Seat of Wisdom, **pray for us.***

*St. John Paul II, **pray for us.***

*St. John Henry Newman, **pray for us.***

*St. Augustine, **pray for us.***

*All holy men and women, **pray for us.***

As You Leave

While making the Sign of the Cross, pray:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

I believe, Lord. Help my unbelief. Amen.

You have taken another step. Faith grows not by having all the answers, but by continuing to walk toward the One who is the Answer.

Go in peace. The journey continues.

"I do believe, help my unbelief!" — Mark 9:24 (NABRE)

Session 3: Hope - Trusting in Love's Promise

Participant Notes

Central Truth

We hope in God's promise of a share in his glory in Heaven. God's promises are trustworthy. Hope offers to us authentic joy and true courage, and sustains us in times of trial.

Key Scripture

Romans 5:3-5 — *"Affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint."*

Jeremiah 29:11 — *"I know well the plans I have in mind for you... plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope."*

Romans 8:28 — *"We know that all things work for good for those who love God."*

Lesson Outline

1. Hope Is Anchored in God's Promises, Not Our Circumstances

- The progression: suffering → endurance → character → **hope**

- Hope doesn't come *despite* suffering—it often comes **through** suffering
- "*Hope does not disappoint*"—because it's anchored in **God's love**, not circumstances
- The Holy Spirit **pours God's love** into our hearts

CCC 1817: *"Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit."*

My Notes:

2. Hope Gives Us a Reason to Live Differently

- God spoke Jeremiah 29:11 to Israel **in exile**—when everything seemed lost
- Hope is not **denial** of present suffering; it's **confidence** in future redemption
- "*Plans for welfare and not for evil*"—God is **for us**, not against us
- Hope **reorders our priorities**: If Heaven is real, this life is preparation

What Hope Does:

- Puts our problems in **perspective**—they're real, but not the end of the story
- Gives us **courage** to face difficulty—we know how the story ends
- Frees us from **despair**—even when things look hopeless, God is working
- Motivates **holiness**—if Heaven is our destination, we want to be ready

My Notes:

3. The Enemies of Hope

Two Sins Against Hope:

Sin	What It Is	What It Says
Despair	Giving up on God's promises	"God can't" or "God won't"
Presumption	Taking God's promises for granted	"God must" or "God owes me"

Despair looks like: - Believing your sins are too great to be forgiven - Believing your situation is beyond God's help - Believing Heaven isn't real or isn't for you

Presumption looks like: - Assuming you'll be saved without conversion - Expecting forgiveness without repentance - Living however you want because "God is merciful"

CCC 2091: *"Despair... is contrary to God's goodness, to his justice—for the Lord is faithful to his promises—and to his mercy."*

My Notes:

Key Takeaway

Hope is what **gets us through**. When the diagnosis is bad, when the relationship is broken, when the future is uncertain—hope says:

"God is faithful. He keeps his promises. This is not the end."

My Response

One thing I want to remember about this lesson:

Act of Hope

*O my God, relying on your infinite goodness and promises, I hope to obtain pardon of my sins, the help of your grace, and life everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer. **Amen.***

Session 3 Devotional: Anchored in Hope

15 Minutes with Jesus

"Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us." — Romans 5:5 (NABRE)

The Anchor That Holds

Life is hard. You know this.

You have learned that God exists—and that evil and suffering are real. You have seen how God's answer to suffering is love: truth, justice, and mercy woven together. You have traced His covenant faithfulness through history, even when His people failed Him again and again.

God does not abandon. God keeps His promises. This is the foundation of hope.

And yet—there are days when the weight feels unbearable. Anxiety about the future. Grief over the past. Discouragement in the present. The state of the world. The struggles in your own life. Moments when you wonder if things will ever change.

And yet—you are here. You have not given up. Something in you keeps reaching for the light.

That something is hope.

Hope is not optimism. Optimism says, "Things will probably work out." Hope says, "God is faithful, no matter what happens." Optimism depends on circumstances. Hope depends on God.

Jesus said:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." (John 14:27, NABRE)

St. Padre Pio wrote:

"Pray, hope, and don't worry. Worry is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayer."

St. Thomas Aquinas defined hope this way:

"Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit."

Notice: hope relies *not on our own strength*. This is crucial. Hope is not about being strong enough to endure. Hope is about trusting a God who is strong enough to carry us.

Hope Built on Grace and Faith

We have journeyed through grace—God's free gift of Himself. We have said yes in faith—believing that God is who He says He is. Now hope takes us further.

Hope is faith looking forward.

- **Grace** is God giving Himself to us.
- **Faith** is believing that gift is real.
- **Hope** is trusting that God will complete what He has begun.
- **Love** will be living fully in that completion.

St. Paul understood this progression when he wrote to the Philippians:

"I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6, NABRE)

God has begun something in you. Hope trusts that He will finish it.

Reflection Questions

Sit quietly with Jesus. Let these questions rest in your heart.

1. Where in my life am I tempted to despair or discouragement?

Can I bring that place to Jesus right now and ask for hope?

My thoughts:

2. What am I trying to carry that I need to surrender to God?

Anxiety? Grief? Fear? The need to control?

My thoughts:

3. How would my life be different if I truly believed God's promises?

What would I do? What would I stop doing? How would I face tomorrow?

My thoughts:

A Prayer for Hope

Pray this slowly, from your heart:

Lord Jesus, I am tired.

I am tired of struggling. Tired of waiting. Tired of wondering if things will ever change.

But I come to You because I believe You are faithful. I come to You because Your promises are true. I come to You because You are my only hope.

Anchor my soul in You. When the storms come, hold me fast. When the darkness closes in, be my light. When I am tempted to give up, remind me that You never give up on me.

I place my hope in You alone.

Amen.

Traditional Prayer: Act of Hope

This ancient prayer expresses confident trust in God's promises. Pray it slowly, letting each phrase strengthen your heart.

O my God, relying on your infinite goodness and promises, I hope to obtain pardon of my sins, the help of your grace, and life everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer.

Amen.

Rest in His Presence

Now, set aside this booklet.

You have reflected. You have prayed. But the most important thing is simply to *be* with Jesus.

He is here—truly present in the Blessed Sacrament before you. You don't need to solve your problems right now. You don't need to feel hopeful. Just rest in the presence of the One who holds your future. Speak to Him from your heart—your fears, your weariness, your longing for something more. Or simply be still and let His peace wash over you.

Remain here in silence until the bell rings.

When you hear the bell, pray the closing prayer below, then return quietly to the Parish Hall.

Closing Prayer: The Anima Christi

Ask Christ to anchor your hope as you pray:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me. *Body of Christ, save me. Blood of Christ, inebriate me. Water from the side of Christ, wash me. Passion of Christ, strengthen me. O good Jesus, hear me. Within your wounds, hide me. Permit me not to be separated from you. From the wicked foe, defend me. At the hour of my death, call me and bid me come to you, that with your saints I may praise you forever and ever. **Amen.***

We do not walk this journey alone. The saints who have gone before us intercede for us. Ask for their prayers:

*Holy Mary, Mother of Hope, **pray for us.***

*St. John Paul II, **pray for us.***

*St. Padre Pio, **pray for us.***

*St. Thomas Aquinas, **pray for us.***

*All holy men and women, **pray for us.***

As You Leave

While making the Sign of the Cross, pray:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, I place my hope in You. Amen.

You are not alone. You have never been alone. The God who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.

Go in peace. The journey continues.

"For I know well the plans I have in mind for you—oracle of the LORD—plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope." — Jeremiah 29:11 (NABRE)

Session 4: Love - Participating in God's Life

Participant Notes

Central Truth

Love is the essence of the inner life of the Trinity. It is the soul of holiness and the basis upon which we will be judged. In Heaven, the faithful will live in the joy of perfect love.

Key Scripture

1 John 4:8, 16 — "God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him."

John 13:34-35 — "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."

Matthew 25:40 — "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."

Lesson Outline

1. God IS Love—Not Just That He Loves

- "God IS love"—love is his very **nature**
- The Trinity is an **eternal communion of love**: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

- We were created to **participate** in this love—to receive it and give it
- *"He who does not love does not know God"*—you cannot know God **without loving**

CCC 1822: *"Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God."*

My Notes:

2. Love Is a Command—Which Means It's a Choice

- Jesus **commands** us to love—love is an **act of the will**, not just a feeling
- *"As I have loved you"*—the standard is **Christ's love**, not human affection
- How did Jesus love? **Sacrificially. Unconditionally. To the point of death.**
- *"By this all men will know"*—love is the **mark** of a Christian

What Love Is NOT: - A feeling (though feelings may accompany it) - Approval of everything someone does - Being "nice" or avoiding conflict - Earned or deserved

What Love IS: - **Willing the good** of the other - **Self-gift**—giving yourself for the sake of another - An **act of the will** that can be commanded and chosen - The **fulfillment** of the entire law (Romans 13:10)

My Notes:

3. The Final Test—Love in Action

- This is the **basis on which we will be judged** (Matthew 25)
- Jesus doesn't ask about our theology or feelings—he asks about our **actions**
- *"As you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me"*
- Love must be **concrete**—it must take action

The Sins Against Love:

Sin	What It Is
Indifference	Not caring
Ingratitude	Taking God's love for granted
Lukewarmness	Half-hearted response to God's love
Acedia	Refusing to engage with God's love
Hatred	The direct opposite of love

My Notes:

The Progression of the Day

Virtue	What It Is	What It Does
Grace	God giving us his life	So that we can love
Faith	Saying "yes" to God	So that we receive his love

Virtue	What It Is	What It Does
Hope	Trusting God's promises	So that we're freed to love without fear
Love	The destination	Participating in the very life of the Trinity

Key Takeaway

The question isn't *"Do you feel loving?"*

The question is *"Will you choose to love?"*

Jesus said: *"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Not by your knowledge. Not by your attendance. Not by your feelings. By your love.

My Response

One thing I want to remember about this lesson:

One specific way I will choose to love this week:

Act of Love

*O my God, I love you above all things, with my whole heart and soul, because you are all good and worthy of all my love. I love my neighbor as myself for the love of you. I forgive all who have injured me, and I ask pardon of all whom I have injured. **Amen.***

Session 4 Devotional: Abiding in Love

15 Minutes with Jesus

"God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him." — 1 John 4:16
(NABRE)

The Destination of the Journey

You have traveled far—not just today, but throughout your entire OCIA journey.

You learned that God exists and that the solution to evil and suffering is love. You discovered that love is not a feeling but a reality that binds truth, justice, and mercy together. You met the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—an eternal communion of love. You traced God's covenant plan, saw it fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and found it alive in the Church, the Mass, the sacraments.

Everything you have learned has been pointing here. To love.

Today you began with grace—the overwhelming gift of God pouring out His very life toward you. You responded with faith—saying yes to a God who reveals Himself. You anchored yourself in hope—trusting that God will complete what He has begun.

Now you arrive at the destination: Love.

But here is the beautiful truth—love is not just the destination. Love has been with you all along. Grace *is* love reaching out. Faith *is* love received. Hope *is* love trusted. And now, love calls you to *remain*.

St. John understood this when he wrote:

"In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10, NABRE)

Love begins with God. Always. You are not here to earn God's love. You are here to receive it, to rest in it, and to let it transform you.

God IS Love

St. Paul wrote that faith, hope, and love abide—but *the greatest of these is love* (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Why is love the greatest?

Because love is who God is. Not just what God does—who God is. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are an eternal communion of self-giving love. And this love—this very love—has been pursuing you your entire life. Before you knew His name. Before you walked through the doors of this parish. Before you took your first breath. God's love was there.

St. Augustine captured this beautifully:

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

The restlessness you have felt—the longing, the searching, the ache for something more—that is your heart seeking the love it was made for. And that love is here. That love is now. That love is Jesus, present before you.

Called to Be Love in the World

But God does not call you simply to receive His love. He calls you to *become* His love in the world.

The prophet Micah asked what the Lord requires of us. The answer echoes through the ages:

"You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8, NABRE)

This is your calling. This is why you are here. Not just to know about God's love, but to *be* God's love—to bear truth in a world drowning in lies, to do justice where injustice reigns, to love mercy when the world demands vengeance, and to walk humbly with your God every step of the way.

Jesus gave everything for you. Now He invites you to give your whole life to Him.

St. John of the Cross wrote:

"In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone."

Not on how much we knew. Not on how much we accomplished. Not on how impressive our faith appeared. On love. Only love.

The Next Generation

Look around you. The world is dark. But you—*you*—are called to be light.

Jesus said:

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden." (Matthew 5:14, NABRE)

You are the next generation that brings light into the darkness. You are the ones who will carry the faith forward. You are the hands and feet of Christ in a world that desperately needs to see His love made visible.

This is not a burden. This is a gift. This is the adventure you were made for.

Reflection Questions

Sit quietly with Jesus. Let these questions rest in your heart.

1. Do I truly believe that God—who IS love—has been pursuing me my whole life?

How does this change the way I see my past, my present, my future?

My thoughts:

2. Am I willing to give my whole life to Christ, as He gave His life for me?

What am I still holding back? What would it look like to surrender completely?

My thoughts:

3. How is God calling me to be His love in the world?

To bear truth? To do justice? To love mercy? To walk humbly? Where is He sending me?

My thoughts:

4. Will I accept the call to be light in the darkness?

The world needs what you have received. Will you share it?

My thoughts:

A Prayer of Total Surrender

Pray this slowly, from your heart:

Lord Jesus, You are Love.

You loved me before I knew You. You loved me when I ran from You. You love me now, in all my weakness and failure.

I give You my whole life. Not part of it. Not the easy parts. All of it. As You gave Yourself completely for me, I give myself completely to You.

Make me Your love in the world. Send me to bear truth where there are lies. Send me to do justice where there is oppression. Send me to love mercy where there is cruelty. Teach me to walk humbly with You every day.

I am Yours. Use me. Send me. I am ready.

"You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

Amen.

Traditional Prayer: Act of Love

This ancient prayer expresses the heart of charity—loving God above all and neighbor for God's sake. Pray it slowly, letting each phrase become your own.

O my God, I love you above all things, with my whole heart and soul, because you are all good and worthy of all my love.

I love my neighbor as myself for the love of you.

I forgive all who have injured me, and I ask pardon of all whom I have injured.

Amen.

Rest in His Presence

Now, set aside this booklet.

You have reflected. You have prayed. But the most important thing is simply to *be* with Jesus—Love Himself.

He is here—truly present in the Blessed Sacrament before you. You don't need to do anything. You don't need to prove anything. Just rest in the arms of the Jesus who loves you more than you can imagine. Speak to Him from your heart—your gratitude, your surrender, your desire to love as He loves. Or simply be still and receive His love.

Remain here in silence until the bell rings.

When you hear the bell, pray the closing prayer below, then return quietly to the Parish Hall.

Closing Prayer: The Anima Christi

Ask Christ to fill you with His love as you pray:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save me. Blood of Christ, inebriate me. Water from the side of Christ, wash me. Passion of Christ, strengthen me. O good Jesus, hear me. Within your wounds, hide me. Permit me not to be separated from you. From the wicked foe, defend me. At the hour of my death, call me and bid me come to you, that with your saints I may praise you forever and ever. ***Amen.***

We do not walk this journey alone. The saints who have gone before us intercede for us. Ask for their prayers:

*Holy Mary, Queen of Heaven, **pray for us.***

*St. John Paul II, **pray for us.***

*St. Augustine, **pray for us.***

*St. John of the Cross, **pray for us.***

*All holy men and women, **pray for us.***

As You Leave

While making the Sign of the Cross, pray:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, help me to love as You love. Amen.

You have received grace. You have said yes in faith. You have anchored yourself in hope. Now go and love—for love is why you were made.

Go in peace. The journey continues—and love leads the way.

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God." — 1 John 4:7 (NABRE)

Session 5: Closing - Integration and Commissioning

Time: 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM **Location:** Sanctuary

Session Overview

Time	Duration	Activity	Location
3:30 PM	60 min	Closing Session	Sanctuary

Teaching Content

Key Points

- Integration: How the virtues work together
 - Living the theological virtues daily
 - Communal prayer and blessing
 - Reposition of Blessed Sacrament
-

Scripture Foundation

All Scripture from previous sessions integrated:

Grace

- **Ephesians 2:4-10** - "For by grace you have been saved through faith"
- **2 Corinthians 12:9** - "My grace is sufficient for you"
- **John 1:14-16** - "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace"

Faith

- **Hebrews 11:1** - "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for"
- **Romans 10:17** - "Faith comes from hearing"
- **Mark 9:24** - "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Hope

- **Romans 5:5** - "Hope does not disappoint us"
- **Romans 8:24-25** - "In hope we were saved"
- **1 Peter 3:15** - "Always be ready to give a reason for your hope"

Love

- **1 John 4:8** - "God is love"
- **1 Corinthians 13:13** - "The greatest of these is love"
- **John 15:13** - "Greater love has no one than this"

Catechism References

All Catechism references from previous sessions:

- **Grace:** CCC 1996-2005
- **Theological Virtues Overview:** CCC 1812-1829
- **Faith:** CCC 1814-1816
- **Hope:** CCC 1817-1821

- **Love (Charity):** CCC 1822-1829
-

Closing Prayer

To be developed

Commissioning

To be developed

Notes

Use this space to record your thoughts, insights, and what God is speaking to your heart during the retreat.

Session 1: Grace

Session 2: Faith

Session 3: Hope

Session 4: Love

Closing Reflections

What I Want to Remember

My Next Steps

