

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Jesus invites us to say yes to his invitation to follow him.
- The Gospels report many different responses to Jesus' invitation.
- Catechumens become the "elect" through the rite of election.



- As you approach Easter and initiation into the Christian community, it's time to examine your life in relation to what Christ asks of you. Jesus has been calling you your entire life. How have you responded to that call?



- How will you continue to respond to Christ in new and deeper ways? Where is Jesus leading you?

Election: Saying Yes to Jesus

On the first Sunday of Lent, catechumens celebrate the rite of election and enter the period of purification and enlightenment, which leads to the celebration of the Easter sacraments. *Election* comes from a word that means "choose." The ceremony reflects this theme: God has chosen and called us.

The Church community hears testimony from godparents and catechists about how the catechumens have responded to God's call. The community accepts the catechumens, who state their desire to join the Church. They write their names in the *Book of the Elect* as one of "the chosen."

Baptized Christians seeking full communion with the Catholic Church may celebrate a rite called the call to continuing conversion.

Many Are Called

Jesus invited many to become his disciples, carry on his mission, and follow the way of the cross. Some responded enthusiastically. Former disciples of John the Baptist, Galilean fishermen, tax collectors, people from every walk of life accepted his call and followed him.

But the Gospels record several incidents in which potential disciples refused to commit to Christ and let the opportunity slip away.

"I Will...but First..."

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke describe Jesus' encounter with those who say they desire to follow Jesus but not quite yet: "Lord, let me go first and bury my father" (Matthew 8:21; Luke 9:59). In Jesus' time, this meant, "Let me come after my father is dead." And this didn't necessarily mean the father was old or sick.

"I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home."

Luke 9:61

These people declared their willingness to follow Christ, but at their own convenience, on their own terms. To them, Jesus replied: "Let the dead bury their dead....No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60, 62).

Those who accept Jesus' call must do so promptly, enthusiastically, and completely. The Galilean fishermen "left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:11). The tax collector, "leaving everything behind... got up and followed him" (Luke 5:28).

When Jesus came to the house of Martha and Mary in Bethany, Mary "sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak" (Luke 10:39). Martha had other priorities and wanted Mary to help her, but Jesus answered, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her" (Luke 10:41-42).

- What is helping you become an "I will" disciple instead of a "would be" disciple?



"This Saying Is Hard..."

In chapter 6 of John's Gospel, Jesus foreshadows his institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist:

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

John 6:54-56

The disciples were shocked, saying: "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" (John 6:60). When Jesus refused to modify his claims, "many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him" (John 6:66). As long as Jesus' teaching matched their expectations, they were content to follow. When Jesus challenged their presuppositions rather than telling them what they wanted to hear, they left him.

- How do you respond when something Jesus says makes you uncomfortable?



Choose a part of Jesus' teaching you find difficult. With your leader's or sponsor's help, find a Gospel verse that reflects this teaching. Let Jesus guide you as you read the passage:

Read the passage as you slowly breathe in and out.

1. Imagine Jesus talking to you.
2. Let him gently lead you through the teaching and address your concerns.
3. Sit in Jesus' presence and listen for his loving response.

- What are your greatest fears or doubts regarding this matter? What do you find challenging?
- How does this passage enlighten your understanding? What is Jesus saying to you?
- What steps can you take to better accept this teaching?



In contrast, when Jesus asked the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter replied, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:67-69). The faith of the Twelve enabled them to remain disciples of Christ while others retreated, scandalized and confused.

When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, he said things that must have been hard to hear. Not only did he promise her living water that would keep her from thirsting but he told her that she and other Samaritans "worship what you do not understand" (John 4:22).

Most difficult of all, he laid bare her whole life. When she said she had no husband, Jesus said, "you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband" (John 4:18). She could have reacted with resentment or indignation to any of these "hard sayings." Instead, she ran to tell others that Jesus is the Messiah. Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony: "He told me everything I have done" (John 4:39). Her faith, and theirs, was deepened by hearing the truth.

"He Went Away Sad..."

Perhaps the most poignant of Jesus' conversations was with a rich young man who asked:

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?... All of these [commandments] I have observed from my youth.' Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, 'You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions."

Mark 10:17-22

Although the young man had observed all the commandments, his first allegiance was to his wealth. It gave him a sense of identity and security.

- What gives you a sense of identity and security? How attached are you to your possessions?



The rich young man didn't realize that true identity and security come from Christ. He wasn't sure that what he'd find in Christ would compensate for surrendering his possessions. So he left saddened.

In contrast, consider the generosity of the woman who "came with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil... and poured it on his head" (Mark 14:3). This perfume was worth "three hundred days' wages," yet that sacrifice didn't stop her. She gave generously out of love. For that reason, Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mark 14:9).

"I Do Not Know Him..."

Probably the saddest loss for Jesus came after his arrest. Just when Jesus needed his closest friends the most, they ran away. Peter, who'd sworn he would die with Jesus, denied Jesus three times: "I do not know him" (Luke 22:57). John was the only one of the Twelve Apostles who attended Jesus' crucifixion and burial.

The women were faithful despite the danger: "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala" (John 19:25). "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb" (Matthew 27:61), watching as Jesus was buried. They returned later to anoint his body and were the first to see the resurrected Jesus, the first to carry the news of Easter to the world.

- When have you been uncomfortable about sharing your choice to follow Jesus? Why?
- When have you run from the cross?



Our Response to Jesus' Call

Our Lenten liturgies and penitential practices help us explore our own readiness to respond to Christ's call. There's probably a little bit of the would-be disciple in each of us—a part of ourselves that holds on to doubt, discouragement, or confusion in our relationship to God or Church. We may be tempted to seek our security beyond Christ and his love for us. Sometimes the demands of discipleship may seem too restrictive, inconvenient, uncomfortable, or unreasonable.

When we realize we've hesitated and want to turn back, it's time to remember all the disciples who ran away and then returned. Like Peter, we can turn from "I do not know him" to "Lord, you know that I love you" (John 21:15). But we must then accept the cost of discipleship as Peter did.

There's no question that it's difficult to give an unconditional "yes" to Christ, to embrace wholeheartedly the cross he asks us to carry. But if we ask the Lord to help us make that leap of faith, abandoning the pride, insecurity, selfishness, or apathy that can cripple discipleship, we'll respond ever more generously to him.

"Let your 'yes' mean 'yes.'"

Matthew 5:37



Read 2 Corinthians 1:18–20 and Luke 14:28.
Reflect on your response to God's call.



- How ready am I to say, "I've calculated the cost and am ready to follow Christ?"
- What is God asking of me today (possible sacrifices, costs of discipleship)?

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