**Every Catholic Deserves to Know Their Story**

**A Parish-Wide Study of *Symbolon***

**Homily Talking Points**

***SYMBOLON – Knowing the Faith***

**Session 1 – The Journey of Faith**

* God freely chose to create us out of his own love and goodness, so that we could share in his blessed life.
* We were created by the God who is love, and we are made for his love. As St. Augustine says, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in him.”
* At every moment of our lives, God draws near to us, calling us to seek him, to know him, and to love him.
* There is only one God, but this one God has revealed himself as a communion of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
* God himself is an eternal exchange of love: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange.
* Faith is our response to God who has made himself known to us. Faith has two key aspects. On one hand, it is an assent of our minds to all that God has revealed. On the other hand, it is a personal adherence to God by which we entrust our lives to him.

**Session 2 – Divine Revelation**

* God desires that we know him, love him, and understand His plan of salvation.
* God gradually communicated himself through deeds and words in salvation history culminating in the person of Jesus Christ, the fullness of Divine Revelation.
* The revelation of Jesus Christ was passed down orally through Sacred Tradition and in writing through Sacred Scripture.
* This Deposit of Faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition was entrusted by the Apostles to the teaching office of the Church, called the Magisterium, for its authentic interpretation.
* To know and understand God’s revelation, a Christian needs Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium. Each are so connected in the transmission of Divine Revelation that one cannot stand without the others.

**Session 3 – The Bible**

* Sacred Scripture contains the Word of God, which was written by human authors under his inspiration.
* God is the author of the Sacred Scriptures. He inspired the human authors, through their own language, style, and powers, to consign to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.
* Because God is the author, the Scriptures always teach the truth.
* The Bible is to be read literarily, which means that we must discern what the human authors intended and what God wants to reveal through them.
* All Scripture tells a single story—the story of salvation that culminates in Jesus. The Old Testament prepares for the New, and the New Testament fulfills the Old.
* The Catholic Church, under the guidance of the Spirit, has discerned which books are included in the list (or canon) of authentic Scriptures.
* The Church has always seen the Scriptures as essential to nourishing and governing Christian lives.

**Session 4 – The Story of Salvation**

* God, who is infinitely perfect and happy in himself, freely created man to make him share his own goodness and love (cf. CCC, no. 1).
* Union with God brought harmony to the human family.
* Man and woman disobeyed God and refused to give themselves in love.
* This sin broke our relationship with God, broke the harmony between man and woman, brought death into the world, and wounded our human nature leaving us with the inclination to sin.
* God sent his Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins, offering on our behalf the perfect gift of love that restores us to the Father, and to send the Holy Spirit to fill us with his very life.
* Jesus established the universal “Catholic” Church to gather the broken family of man into the united family of God.
* The Catholic Church passes on the teachings of Christ and, through the sacraments, dispenses the graces he won for us on the Cross to enable us to live like him on earth and with him forever in Heaven.

**Session 5 – Who is Jesus?**

* God spoke to his people through the prophets during the Old Testament times, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.
* Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is one divine person who possesses two natures. He is truly God and truly man, not part God and part man. This profound and awesome teaching is called the hypostatic union.
* As both God and man, Jesus is the one and only mediator between God and man.
* Jesus became human to help us know God’s love, to reconcile us with God and save us, to model a holy life, and to make it possible for God to live within us.

**Session 6 – The Paschal Mystery**

* Fully human, Jesus can represent the human family and offer a gift of love on behalf of all humanity. Fully divine, his gift of love takes on infinite value--offering the perfect, redemptive sacrifice for all.
* When we say Jesus “descended into hell” in the Creed, this does not refer to the place of damnation, but the realm of the dead. Jesus in his human soul united to his divine person went to the realm of the dead and opened Heaven’s gates for the just who had gone before him.
* By his Death, Jesus liberates us from sin. By his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to new life in him that we may become sons and daughters of God and have eternal life.
* By his Ascension into Heaven, Jesus precedes us into his Father’s glorious kingdom in Heaven and then sends us the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
* Jesus invites us to participate in the mystery of his Death and Resurrection by uniting our entire lives—our daily works, joys, and sufferings—with the Cross of Christ.

**Session 7 – The Holy Spirit**

* The Holy Spirit is the Third Divine Person of the Holy Trinity, the bond of love between the Father and the Son.
* The Holy Spirit builds, animates, and sanctifies the Church through the proclamation of the Gospel, the sacraments, and by working in the life of the Christian. God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.
* The gifts of the Holy Spirit are permanent dispositions in the soul, making it more docile to God’s promptings.
* Through the power of the Spirit, Christians can die to self and bear much fruit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control.
* Our liberation from sin and becoming a son or a daughter of God is a gift freely given to us through faith.
* We remain in God’s family and mature as his spiritual children through love and good works. Faith and works are interrelated in God’s plan of salvation.

**Session 8 – Why Do I Need the Church?**

* The Church is both human and divine, earthly and heavenly.
* God has used human people, rituals, and institutions to gather his people and accomplish his plan of salvation.
* There are three visible bonds of community in the Church: the bond of apostolic succession through the bishops who maintain the fraternal harmony of God’s family; the bond of a common celebration of worship particularly in the sacraments; and finally, the bond of professing the one faith received from the Apostles.
* There are four chief characteristics of the Church, known as the marks of the Church.
* The Church is “one” because that is what Jesus intended. He prayed that we would all be one even as he is one with the Father.
* The Church is “holy” in the sense that it is united with Christ, sanctified by him, and endowed by him with the fullness of the means of salvation.
* The Church is “Catholic,” meaning “universal” in the sense that Christ is present in her throughout the world, and because the Church has been sent by Christ to bring all humanity into communion with him.
* The church is “apostolic” because it is founded on the Apostles and faithfully hands on the teachings of the apostles. The Church continues to be guided by the successors of the Apostles, the bishops.

**Session 9 – Mary and the Saints**

* The Church teaches four important dogmas about Mary: Mother of God; Immaculate Conception; Perpetual Virginity; Spiritual Mother.
* Mary is the mother of God because her son Jesus is God.
* Mary is the Immaculate Conception. She was conceived full of grace and without original sin. She was endowed with this unique gift so that she might be a pure vessel for the Son of God and, by the grace of God, she remained free from sin for her whole life.
* Mary conceived of Jesus as a virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit. She remained a virgin throughout her life as a sign of her exemplary faith and total gift of herself to God’s will.
* At the end of her earthly life, Mary was given the unique privilege of being assumed body and soul into Heaven, anticipating the resurrection of all Christ’s faithful at the end of time.
* Mary is the spiritual mother for all Christians. Because of her complete cooperation with Jesus’s redemptive work, she continually intercedes on our behalf before her Son.
* Catholics honor Mary and the saints as models to imitate and we give glory to God for the great work he accomplished in their lives. The saints draw us closer to God.
* Catholics do not worship Mary and the saints. Rather, we seek their intercession for our needs just like we might ask a friend to pray for us.

**Session 10 – The Last Things**

* Every person will receive a “particular judgment” at their death. If they die in the state of grace, in friendship with Christ, they receive entrance into Heaven (whether immediately or through purification). If they die out of friendship with Christ, never accepting His loving mercy, they remain separated from God for all eternity.
* We cannot be united with God unless we choose to love him. The definitive self-exclusion from unity with God is called Hell.
* Heaven is the perfect communion of life and love with the Trinity and all the angels and saints. This perfect communion with God, where we see him face-to-face, is the fulfillment of every human desire and the state of complete happiness.
* There are some who die in friendship with God, and their souls are assured of Heaven, but they first must undergo a purification of all attachment to sin before entering full communion with God in Heaven. This purification is called Purgatory.
* Catholics pray for the dead so that their loving intercession might contribute to the souls’ purification and hasten their union with God in heaven.
* At the end of time, Christ will come again in glory, our bodies will be resurrected, and all humanity will face the Last Judgment, in which the truth of each man’s relationship with God will be made known and the consequences of each person’s actions will be revealed.

***SYMBOLON – Living the Faith***

**Session 1: The Sacraments – Baptism and Confirmation**

* Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is given to us.
* The sacraments bear fruit in those who receive them with the required disposition.
* Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are the Sacraments of Initiation, which lay the foundations of the Christian life.
* Reconciliation (or Penance) and Anointing of the Sick are the two Sacraments of Healing, which heal and strengthen the soul weakened by illness and sin.
* Matrimony and Holy Orders are the two Sacraments of Service, which are directed toward the salvation of others.
* Baptism is the gateway of the Christian life as the soul passes through Christ’s death and resurrection and is reborn as a child of God.
* In **Ba**ptism, we are forgiven of sin, filled with the Spirit, made into a new creature, incorporated into the Church, permanently marked as belonging to Christ, and made citizens of heaven.
* Confirmation deepens baptismal grace. It unites us more firmly with Christ, increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit, binds us to the Church, and gives the strength to spread the Gospel.

**Session 2 – The Eucharist**

* The bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Mass.
* Though the outward, sensible appearances of bread and wine remains, Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. The substance of the elements change by the power of the Holy Spirit.
* The Mass is a sacrifice because it re-presents the sacrifice of Jesus to the Father on the cross. The Mass is a memorial of this event, and we are called to unite our lives with Christ’s gift of himself to the Father.
* Jesus loves us so much he desired to come to us in Holy Communion.
* It is important to take time for loving thanksgiving with Jesus after we receive him in Holy Communion.
* Although all are invited, not all are ready to receive the Eucharist, either because of serious sin that has not been brought to the sacrament of reconciliation or for a lack of full communion with the Catholic Church.

**Session 3 – A Walk Through the Mass**

* The Mass consists of two great parts that together constitute one single act of worship: 1) the Liturgy of the Word; 2) the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
* The Liturgy of the Word consists of the Scripture readings, the homily, the Creed, and the general intercessions.
* The Liturgy of the Eucharist consists of the presentation of the bread and wine, the Eucharistic prayer in which Christ’s Body and Blood becomes present, and the communion rite.
* The Introductory Rite at the start of Mass prepares us for God’s Word and Sacrament.
* The Concluding Rite at the end of Mass commissions the faithful to bring the good news of salvation to the world.
* Catholics are obliged to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation and to receive the Eucharist at least once a year, if possible during the Easter season.

**Session 4 – Penance and Anointing of the Sick**

* Jesus breathed on the Apostles and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” [John 20:19-23]. Jesus forgave people’s sins and gave this power to men to exercise in his name.
* Only God can forgive sin, but he does so through the priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
* This power has been handed down to the Apostles’ successors throughout the centuries to the bishops and priests in the Church today.
* The sacrament reconciles us with God, reconciles us with the Church, gives us peace of conscience, and gives us greater spiritual strength to help us overcome sin in the future.
* As we prepare for Confession, we should examine our consciences. Using the Ten Commandments is a good starting place.
* Penance and Anointing of the Sick are sacraments of healing.
* Anointing of the Sick is given by a priest to a baptized person who is seriously sick or in danger of death. The anointing gives strength to endure suffering in a Christian way, forgiveness of sins, and even restoration of health, if it is within God’s will and conducive to the person’s salvation.

**Session 5 – Matrimony and Holy Orders**

* Jesus raised marriage to the dignity of a Sacrament, and it is validly contracted between one baptized man and one baptized woman. It is a sacrament in which couples are called to signify the union of Jesus and the Church.
* Marriage is a covenant given by God for the good of the couple and for the procreation and upbringing of children.
* The Sacrament of Matrimony helps couples in their daily lives to grow in sacrificial love and unity, giving couples the grace to love each other with the love of Christ for his Church.
* In the wedding rite, we see four key aspects of Christian marriage: free, total, faithful, and fruitful gift of one’s self. In other words, marriage is based upon free consent, total self-giving, life-long commitment, and fruitfulness as seen in the willingness to accept children as a gift from God.
* Marriage is indissoluble, meaning that it is lifelong, and no human power can break its bonds.
* The mission entrusted by Jesus to his Apostles continues to be exercised today by bishops, priests, and deacons through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

**Session 6 – A Catholic Moral Vision**

* God placed in the human heart a desire for beatitude, for true happiness, which is found only in him. His moral law is the pathway to happiness.
* Virtue is the habitual disposition to do the good. Virtue brings true freedom because it helps a person rise above his selfish desires and give the best of himself to God and others.
* The theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity dispose us to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity, our source of grace to live a virtuous life.
* There are three sources of the morality of human acts: the object (or the act itself), the intention, and the circumstances. One may not do evil so that good may result from it.
* Sin is a spoken word, an action, or a desire contrary to God’s moral law. Mortal sin breaks friendship with God, while venial sin hinders one’s friendship with God.
* Mortal sin is choosing deliberately, with full knowledge, something that is gravely contrary to God’s moral law.
* To receive God’s mercy, we must acknowledge our sin, repent, and ask God for his forgiveness. We must confess mortal sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to the reception of the Eucharist. We ought to confess our venial sins.
* The Catholic Church teaches that a person must follow his conscience that has been informed with the Word of God found in Scripture and proclaimed in the Church’s teachings.

**Session 7 – A Love that Lasts**

* Eros is the Greek word that describes romantic love in which attraction and passion suddenly overcomes a person.
* Agape is the Greek word that describes total, committed, unconditional, and even sacrificial love. It wills the good of another.
* If eros is separated from agape, it becomes self-centered and can lead to using another person.
* The Christian view of love is when eros ascends to the love of agape and is united to Jesus Christ.
* Men and women, who are created in the image and likeness of God, are called to imitate the self-giving love of the Trinity.
* Marriage and sexual love are ordered to the complete self-giving of husband and wife and demands total fidelity to one another in an unbreakable union.

**Session 8 – A Love that Lasts (part 2)**

* Our sexuality affects all aspects of our person in both body and soul. It especially concerns our capacity to love and to procreate.
* The union of man and woman in marriage is meant to reflect Christ’s love.
* In marriage, a couple’s physical union is meant to express a profound personal union.
* The spouses’ union is for both the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. These two cannot be separated without harming the couple’s spiritual life
* Various forms of sexual expression keep us from total self-giving, such as: lust, masturbation, pre-marital sex, and pornography, among others.
* Conjugal love is intended to be fertile and procreative.

**Session 9 – Catholic Social Teaching**

* Human persons are made to show forth the image of God and to live in unity together, reflecting the unity of the Trinity.
* Love of neighbor cannot be separated from love of God.
* Catholic social teaching is a series of principles, criteria, and guidelines for ordering a just society based upon the revelation of Jesus Christ.
* The social doctrine of the Church has as its goal the flourishing of all human persons.
* Social justice is the cause of creating a society that respects the dignity of every human person and allows each person to obtain what is rightfully theirs.

**Session 10 – Catholic Social Teaching (part 2)**

* Human dignity is protected when basic human rights are protected. This begins with a fundamental right to life and protection for that life from conception to natural death.
* Catholic social teaching should inform everyone, not just Catholics, because it is based upon the dignity of every human person.
* Jesus showed a special love for the poor. The Church continues this preferential love for those who are most in need.
* The poor includes those who suffer from unjust oppression, physical and psychological illness, material poverty, poverty of love and relationships, and the spiritual poverty of not knowing Christ’s saving love.
* The corporal works of mercy are: feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, and bury the dead.
* The spiritual works of mercy are: counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish the sinner, comfort the sorrowful, forgive injuries, bear wrongs patiently, pray for the living and the dead.
* Giving alms to the poor is the chief witness to charity.
* The family, as the basic cell of society, is the sanctuary in which people are nurtured, educated, and formed.
* It is crucial to promote strong family life that builds a society of virtuous citizens who contribute to the common good.
* Subsidiarity is the personal responsibility incumbent upon families and individuals that should never be substituted or obstructed by the state or any larger society.
* Catholic social teaching inspires the proper attitudes toward earthly possessions and social and economic relationships.