

PIETY

Recommended Time: 40 Minutes

Orientation

The first day of the Via de Cristo brings us face-to-face with ourselves. As we take a look at our lives, our values and daily activities, a call to live the higher ideal of the conscious life in grace emerges. Piety states in the clearest way what is fundamental to being a Christian and gives a strong call to make an active and dynamic relationship with God the foundation of our lives.

General Comments

Piety, the last talk of the day, is pivotal in the Via de Cristo weekend. It pulls together the talks of the first day and presents the first basic step of being an apostle. Every talk that follows builds on this talk. Piety does not say how to direct one's life to God except in general terms. The process is pointed out, but is not explained in detail. That is all for later.

Atmosphere

As the participants approach the end of the first day, the new questions that they have been asked and the new answers that they are beginning to receive work together to create an atmosphere of expectation. The increasingly spiritual progression of the day has left them re-evaluating their priorities and wondering how to get where they now want to go. The speaker's honesty and vulnerability about his/her own relationship with God provides a candid and unpretentious picture of what it means to be a faithful Christian. This calls the listeners to increased honesty about their own lives and into a more open, seeking and committed relationship with God.

Suggestions for Preparing this Talk

When you introduce the title of the talk, be aware of the negative connotations carried by the word "piety" in our North American culture. The term is often misunderstood. A well-done presentation of the talk, supported by the personal witness of the speaker, creates the appealing new understanding of piety.

The false concepts of piety should be thoughtfully prepared and carefully presented. The main point each false concept criticizes should be expressed clearly. Humor is a useful tool in presenting the concepts of false piety effectively. As participants recognize themselves or others they know during the discussions of these false concepts, they may smile or chuckle about it. However, if the speaker gets carried away with portraying these false concepts too humorously, the intended points may not be conveyed. The first false idea may well be treated

humorously. The second and third can have humor but should be treated with sympathy because these two concepts are most likely to hit home with the participants. The last false concept should be handled strongly and with great care because hypocrisy involves malice.

It's important to avoid putting down the participants when presenting the concepts of false piety. The speaker may make a point that really hits a nerve with one participant or another. If a sensitive participant feels personally attacked, s/he might be distracted from truly hearing the points that follow.

Personal witness must illustrate authentic piety so that these points are real, not just in somebody's imagination. Effective personal testimony in this talk generally contains four elements:

1. A description of the individual's life before spiritual awakening, i.e., the religious condition of the speaker before s/he began to direct his/her whole life to God;
2. An account of the events leading up to the commitment to change, i.e., how the speaker came to realize the value and necessity of directing his/her whole life to God;
3. A description of the actual encounter with and/or surrender to God and the impact of this experience on the speaker.
4. A celebration of the new life following this event -- what a life lived in relationship with God means to the speaker now.

Of these parts, the last is the most important. The speaker tries to convey to the participants what it means to live life in an active and dynamic relationship with God. The speaker does not necessarily have to talk about a single dramatic change or a big conversion. Directing the whole of life to God is always a process. Even if it involves a dramatic change at one point, there are usually a number of other points where the speaker experienced significant awareness, redirection and growth in faith.

The speaker should avoid preaching. The tone of the talk is warm, relational and inviting. The speaker should never give the impression that a life directed wholly to God is a "bed of roses" or that s/he has solved every problem. The speaker is not telling the participants how to live their lives; s/he is just telling them how s/he lives, and how true piety -- directing his/her entire life to God -- has made a difference for the better.

Piety means nothing more than **being** a Christian:

1. Personal relationship involving love and obedience.
2. Reorientation of whole life to God so the God comes **first**.
3. Having Christ live in us so that our lives are an expression of Him.
4. Being totally formed by His will and strengthened by His power.

Your anecdotes, witness throughout the talk should reflect these ideas and principles. Translation of Spanish word "piedad" implies the **direction** of ones whole life as well as certain **practices** which maintain that direction.

OUTLINE

Underlined statements are to written down by the candidates.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. God calls each person to a new life. This involves a radical change from within, which alters our relationships with:

1. Self.
2. God.
3. Other people.
4. The world.

B. Living life in Grace gives Christian purpose and perspective to these relationships. The only valid response to God is in BEING what God intended us to be, not simply in DOING Christian things. This BEING is expressed in three dimensions:

1. Piety.
2. Study.
3. Apostolic Action.

Refer here to the three legs of the tripod - piety, study, action. Study and action will be discussed later.

C. Piety

1. Authentic piety is an intimate, revitalizing, deepening relationship with God.
2. False piety is a superficial, inaccurate or deceptive practice that appears to be Christian. False piety is destructive. It distracts and diverts people from seeking and knowing God and from the fulfilled life God has for them.

II. FALSE PIETY

Note: A Spirit of charity must prevail in this section. Authentic piety exists and has always existed in the church. What is being attacked are false concepts, not those people who hold them. Be sure to mention that we are not discussing individual people; rather, we are looking at misguided attitudes we find among so-called "good Christians."

A. Holy Joes/Hannahs, though well intentioned, have a fearful impression of

God and overemphasize dutiful practices. (Luke 17: 7-10)

1. They believe they can earn their own salvation, gaining heaven by keeping the Law.
2. Their “piety” consists of the practices, duties and traditions of religion that they view as ends in themselves.
3. They desire to be “angels” working for God, but not “saints” who are human beings created in God’s image.
4. They see the world as an evil place and mankind as a threat to their own souls, rather than as the redeemed work of God.
5. They often become so preoccupied with doing good works within the church that they don’t fulfill their family and job responsibilities. Their view lacks maturity.

B. Mechanical Mikes/Routine Ritas go through the external motions of an inner life that they know little about and have never experienced.

1. They are less sincere than the "Holy Joes/Hannahs."
2. They may go to church because they always have, because it is expected of them.
3. They may go to church because they fear hell and want a safety net.
4. Their words are empty. By repeating “Lord, Lord,” they hope to enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 7:21).

C. Clubby Carls/Carols focus on their relationships with people in the church rather than on their relationship with God.

1. They go to church to be with the crowd or for the social outlets the church offers.
2. They don’t operate on a spiritual plane but see the church as equivalent to many other clubs or groups to which they may belong.
3. They desire the social standing that may come from being a member of a church.
4. They go to church for business contacts and professional networking.

D. Phony Phils/Phyllises exhibit their “piety” for the world to see, but live in direct contradiction to that.

1. They seem zealous for God, but instead use religion for their personal gain and glory.
2. They are models of perfection in the church, but are unethical in dealing with others. (Matthew 23:25-26)
3. They demand virtues of others that they do not practice themselves. (Matthew 23:2-4)
4. They are idle gossips who ruin the good name and reputation of others. Though active in church, they turn others away from the truth because of their hypocrisy. (Mark 7:6-8)

All these are examples of people who claim to be “religious” but practice false piety. The practices of these false concepts leave many with no desire or interest in living a true life of piety. A brief personal witness may be appropriate here.

III. AUTHENTIC PIETY

A. Authentic piety comes from a personal relationship with God that is conscious, growing and shared.

1. Piety is living a Christ-centered life. We respond to God’s immeasurable gifts of grace by following Christ’s example in every area of our lives. (John 15:5)
2. Life that is conscious. When we allow God’s grace to permeate even the most commonplace and ordinary aspects of our lives, God’s life in us increases. We are mindful of the unchanging, unceasing presence of God in our lives: the love of God the Father, our friendship with Christ, our brother, and the power of the Holy Spirit in us.
3. Life that is growing. Piety is a life-long process. It is dying to self and living as Christ wants us to live. Our love of God and our self-giving and obedience to God’s will grows when it is fed and declines when neglected.
4. Life that is shared. We are God's channels of grace to others. We must attentively listen to others and share God’s love and life with them.

B. Genuine, authentic piety is directing our whole life to God.

1. Individuals today can and do respond to God's call.
2. There are three elements of every act - knowing, wanting, and doing.
For our whole life to be directed to God these three elements have to be directed to God.
 - a. Knowing - understanding what is done and the reason why it is done, excluding routine, mechanical, automatic, irrational practices.
 - b. Wanting - the ability to set direction for oneself. This is the emotional drive that spurs one to action.
 - c. Doing - the act of the will that converts our plans into realities, surmounting all obstacles, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

When our knowing, wanting and doing are directed by God, it becomes knowing, loving and serving. This is the summary of piety. Piety is directing our whole life to God by knowing who God is and what He taught. Loving God with our whole heart and striving to carry out His will is the full response to the gift of grace.

C. Piety is an ideal. Living in relationship with God is the Christian ideal.

A personal witness is necessary in this section. Emphasize the concept of a relationship with God, a friendship. Piety is acceptance of the gift of friendship with Jesus. **Share what that relationship with Jesus Christ has come to mean in your life.**

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTHENTIC PIETY

Courage, naturalness and vibrancy are characteristics of authentic piety.

A. Courage

1. Furthering the Kingdom of God demands it.
2. Courage to live up to God's expectations rather than those of the world.
3. Courage to call others to their potential, even if it involves risks.

B. Natural

1. The ordinary life made extraordinary through God's grace. (Philippians 4:13)
2. Being Christian in everyday life, as Christ kept the customs of His day.
3. Committed and enthusiastic, but not turning people off with excessive zeal.
4. Authentic - living a life that is consistent with our belief.

C. Vibrant and Joyful Life

1. Lived deeply and fully, life is exciting and stimulating.
2. Gives one strength and vitality which others will find attractive and want to imitate.
3. Overflows into one's relationships with others.

Only by being truly human and embracing all of life can we be real. A brief personal witness may be given here.

V. ACTS OF AUTHENTIC PIETY

A. Distinguish between piety and acts of piety.

1. Piety is an intimate, revitalizing, deepening relationship with God.
2. The acts of piety are those things we do that nourish our relationship with God. They are our concrete, visible responses to God's love for us.

Mention things we can do to strengthen and discipline our lives to God. Acts of piety: morning offering, personal prayer, worship, altar visits, examination of conscience and spiritual direction. Point out their value and regular pattern for our lives and that they are modeled here this weekend. Describe personal practices of piety that nourish your relationship with God. In these practices we encounter nourishment for a deeper, more meaningful spiritual life.

B. As we are directing our whole life to God, we are conscious of being in relationship with the triune God. We are:

1. Children of the Father.
2. Brothers/Sisters of Christ.
3. Temples of the Holy Spirit.

VI. CONCLUSION

God promised us that we would not have to walk through life alone. As we direct our whole life to God, our intimate, revitalizing, deepening relationship with God impacts every area of our lives. The fulfillment and joy we experience in this relationship overflow into our relationships with others. Authentic piety is complete only when it is shared with others.

This talk is to end with this paragraph (or something very much like it).

This morning you were asked to examine yourself and your ideal. Living the life of authentic piety is a choice. God says that He has set before us life and death. Choose life, then. Live life as God intended. Love the Lord your God. Listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him.

CLARIFICATION OF THE OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION

A. God calls each person to a new life. Though this life is indeed new, its essence is the fulfillment of God's plan -- becoming all that God created us to be. Human beings were created in the likeness of God. The relationship between God and humanity is not the relationship of artist and creation, but is more like the relationship of parent and child. The likeness lies deep within, in the spiritual, rational and moral potential of each person; in that part of our being that makes us "human." Thus, we can truly say that God is our Father, and we are His children. We are truly brothers and sisters. This mutual relationship implies completely different requirements and possibilities for human beings compared to that intended for other creatures. Basically, it calls us to become fully human. When God created us, He did a marvelous thing; He gave each of us the tools to become all He created us to be. We have been given the opportunity, as well as the option, to be a part of the most creative work in the world: to complete the task begun by God when he formed us.

1. Our acceptance of this challenging opportunity forms the basic element in living the life in grace. It gives us a new direction for our lives. As we address this challenge, we will begin to see the marvelous potential

that lies within us, the potential to rise above who we are today, the potential to rise above the purely physical side of our being and the potential to be transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit into the likeness of God.

2. God's intentions and desires for mankind are that each person lives in an active relationship with Him. Each person has been created with a deep spiritual need for that relationship and contact with God.
3. Once we begin to live and grow in relationship with God, we are changed. We begin to truly see ourselves as children of God, full of marvelous capabilities. As we are transformed, we begin to see other people through God's eyes, loving them as brothers and sisters who were created with the same incredible potential that God has given to us.
4. As our transformation continues, we come to see our world -- bruised and battered and torn as it is -- as God's gift to us, given for our enjoyment and care.

B. Our relationship with God recreates our being, redirects our lives and revitalizes our relationships with others. Thus, when we speak of piety, we are speaking of a full response --with all of our life -- to God's boundless love and grace. The core of our response to God's immeasurable grace is actually living in relationship with God -- BEING Christian, not just doing Christian things. Being the complete person that God calls us to be consists of balancing three key dimensions of our lives. All three dimensions are essential to being Christian, much as the three legs of a tripod or stool give stability and balance to the objects they support. The three dimensions of being Christian are expressed as:

1. Piety: growing toward God through an active and dynamic relationship with Him. (John 15:5)
2. Study: seeking and learning about God's truth for our world and for our lives, and allowing our minds to be transformed by God. (Romans 12:2)
3. Apostolic Action: responding to our transformation by sharing God's love with the world around us. (Matthew 28:19)

C. A person can respond to God's call in two ways. We can either follow the path of faith and commitment to the dynamic way of BEING what God is calling us to be, or we can devote ourselves to those religious rules, regulations and practices that mark us as "a good Christian" who does "Christian" things. The distinction is between an internal faith-based motivations and being motivated to meet external standards.

1. Authentic piety: Begins with our commitment to becoming the person God called us to be, seeking to love God with all of our heart, mind and

strength and to love our brothers and sisters as we love ourselves. (Matthew 22:37-39) The result is that our actions are those of persons who love God and whose deeds rise out of our response to God's grace, not only from a desire to appear to be a Christian.

2. False piety: Copies the actions of others who may be trying to love God and to walk with Him. This approach is born of misunderstanding and fear. Those who take this path do not understand the role of God's grace in the lives of those who are in relationship with Him. They are convinced that they have to earn God's love and don't think that they can live up to the task, or else they are afraid to make the commitment.

II. FALSE PIETY

This talk will discuss both types of responses, namely authentic piety and false piety. The last talk, Actual Grace, should have cleared away some concerns about fully accepting the Christian ideal as presented in the Grace of God talk and Lay Person as Church in the World talk. The Christian ideal is accessible. We don't have to go it alone. This section of the Piety talk should clear away another major concern - the bad image that piety has because of those who are seem to be very pious (very religious), but don't live it. This talk picks out four of the most prevalent false concepts of "piety" and exposes their inadequacies. At the end of this section, the participants should want to know what authentic piety is, and should be open to it in a new way.

What is being attacked are false concepts, not people. Some may not want to be considered "pious" because they may know someone who is considered "pious" but whose real behavior is dubious or questionable. False concepts of piety drive people from knowing God by presenting a false image of God and our intended relationship to Him. False notions underestimate the value of being fully human, give inaccurate impressions of God and the purpose of the Church, and foster the practice of external manifestations of religion. These and other false concepts of piety prevent people from coming to an authentic relationship with God.

The second purpose of this section is to hold up a mirror to allow some of the participants to see their own misconceptions. By exposing some common ways that piety is distorted, we are helping the participants examine their own attitudes and behaviors.

Making someone feel guilty is not the purpose in discussing these false concepts. Guilt or innocence is in the heart of each individual and is not for us to judge. The point is that a person is often not aware of the nature of his or her attitudes. Be sure to mention that we are not discussing individual people; rather, we are looking at misguided attitudes we find among so-called "good Christians."

Keeping this in mind; we illustrate four false forms of piety. These are presented with decreasing degrees of sympathy, due to their motivations. While the first (Holy Joes/Holy Hannahs) shows a lack of maturity, the second (Mechanical Mikes/Routine Ritas) and third (Clubby Carl /Carols show approaches that are superficial. The last false form of piety (Phony Phils/Phyllises) shows people who serve two masters at once. This is sometimes intentional hypocrisy.

A. The "Holy Joes/Hannahs" tend to view God with fear rather than as a God with boundless love for them. They try to be good so that God won't be angry with them and aren't aware that there is any other way to live in faith.

1. They believe that by dutifully following the Ten Commandments, God will allow them to earn their way to eternal life. They have failed to see that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and that there is no one who is righteous purely because of what they do. (Romans 3:22-23)
2. They see piety as performing various church activities or rituals, as doing certain "God things" instead of a being in relationship with God.
3. They wish they could "be as the angels" and not worry about ordinary things, but God made us to live in His kingdom, and the Kingdom of God begins in this world.
4. Some people who fit this category are those who pull away from the world because they believe the world is evil and should be shunned. They fail to see the world as a gift from God, filled with His people and His wondrous creations of joy and laughter, pain and sorrow. They fear contact with the world and bemoan the fact that they have to live in it.
5. Holy Joes/Hannahs are also those people who are so completely wrapped up in church activities, doing good deeds, that they fail their own families and responsibilities at work. They don't see that God has entrusted us with our families and various responsibilities. We need to do the best we can in all areas of our lives, including our families, work and church. A proper balancing of priorities, however, means that we not sacrifice our home and work responsibilities while we're doing "good things."

This last point is important for many reasons. One significant reason is that it sets the stage for the Environment talk later in the weekend. There we point out that the new life we are talking about consists of living our faith within the environments God has placed us in -- our families and homes, our workplaces, and any of the other groups of people with which we are already involved.

B. Mechanical Mikes/Routine Ritas approach their faith life as a habitual and

often tiresome obligation. They are often not even aware that an inner spiritual life is available to them. They see going to church as part of life's routine.

1. Though the Holy Joes/Hannahs lack maturity, they tend to be sincere and well intentioned in their practices of piety. Mechanical Mikes/Routine Ritas, on the other hand, are more superficial about their faith.
2. They are the usual "Sunday churchgoers" who go to church because they always have or because others go. Some participants belong in this category even though they are on a Via de Cristo weekend and are beginning to desire a closer relationship with God.
3. Although they don't have an active relationship with God, they are covering all of the bases -- just in case. They are afraid that hell might really exist, and figure that going through the motions of going to church will give them the safety net they need. The point to be made here is that our response to God is more than just going to church.
4. Merely mouthing phrases does not mean we are believers. The use of Christ's strong warning in Matthew 7:21 should strengthen the participants' urge to genuinely respond to the call of God being put before them.

C. Clubby Carls/Carols are an increasingly common presence in modern congregations.

1. Like Mike and Rita, they may go to church simply because others do. Their focus, though, rather than being on the superficial routines of the church, is on the social relationships and social activities the congregation provides.
2. Living in an active and dynamic relationship with God rarely, if ever, crosses their minds. They see attending church as being the member of a club in much the same way as being a member of PTA, a country club or a neighborhood association.
3. They want to look good and have the social standing that comes with being associated with a congregation. Their reasoning follows these steps: respectable people in my community go to church; good people in my community go to church; I, therefore, will go to church so people will think I'm respectable and good.
4. Attending church provides excellent professional contacts. Their church membership is equal, in their view, to the other affiliations on their resumes. At church they can develop associations that further their careers and can find customers for the products or services they sell.

The church is not a social club; it is the body of Christ. While there

are social aspects to the gathering of believers, this is simply a byproduct. The church was designed to provide a connection to God in order to bear fruit. God wants more from us than merely going through the motions of the practice of religion. God wants a real relationship with us so that our hearts and minds become conformed to his own.

D. Phony Phils/Phyllises deserve the sharpest treatment because they are so phony.

1. Like the Pharisees, they use the church to satisfy their own ego needs. Though they know about God, they do not know God. They are their own god. (Mark 7:6)
2. Their appearance as good churchgoers stands in sharp contrast to the greedy and self-indulgent lives they lead.
3. They set high standards for others to follow and are very critical of those who can't meet those standards. They themselves could never live up to the standards they set for other people, but they want people to think they are living up to the standards they are setting for others. Their lives are a pretense. They don't walk the talk.
4. They dominate other people, destroying others at will by talking about them. Their behavior turns people away from Christ. Often these people are perceived as pillars of their church. Like Carl and Carol, the church for them might be a club or organization like any other, but for Phil and Phyllis, it is a club in which they can become a little god.

All of these types can be found in our congregations today. Because we are all sinners, we all at times may exhibit characteristics of these false concepts.

III. AUTHENTIC PIETY

This is the key section of the piety talk. The foundation presented in this section is carried through the remaining talks. It is most graphically and meaningfully explained through the life-witness of the speaker. Authentic piety is genuine, the real thing, not a counterfeit or a distortion. It comes from a commitment to God. It is a real part of us, something we understand, want and are committed to, not something that is just put on or that we do because someone wants us to do it. Without saying the terms "study" and "apostolic action," the concept that our relationship with God is conscious, growing and shared hints at the development of these concepts in the Study and Apostolic Action talks which will be developed the following day.

- A. The key to authentic piety is that it is a relationship that involves all of life. Authentic piety arises out of a dynamic personal relationship with God that is conscious, growing and shared. This statement is clarified in Section A and then leads into Section B, which establishes that "Piety is directing one's

whole life to God." The primary emphasis in the entire section is that this relationship involves all of life, every moment of life. This thought is often the most difficult aspect of the talk for some to accept. Most of us tend to compartmentalize, to acknowledge God in this part of our lives or that part, but we rarely include God in every aspect of life. Thus, we explore what it means to direct our whole life toward God, and what this will mean to each person if he or she consciously embraces this relationship. (Matthew 6:33)

1. Piety is living a life that responds to God's incredible gift of grace in His Son Jesus Christ by following Christ's example in every area of our lives. It is a life that follows the example of Christ's life with a deep concern for the world and the needs of others. (John 15:13)

It is a normal life; a life lived in the ordinary world of work and family, experiencing joy and sorrow. This is one of the principal points to emphasize -- it is a very natural thing for a person to live out his/her life in grace. It is not something remote and foreign to ordinary life. Instead, those who live a life directed to God are engaged in work and play, success and failure, friendships and intimate loving relationships with others, birth and death. This is life -- a life worthy of entering into and being lived.

2. God is asking us to consciously choose life with Him. It doesn't just happen; we have a part in it. When we allow our relationship with God to permeate even the most commonplace and ordinary aspects of our lives, God's life in us increases. God lives with us, knows us intimately, and desires that we recognize our role in His plan. We yearn to understand God's will for us. It surrounds us each day in our daily lives if we are open to it. We are to become conscious of our lives with God. We must have a conscious awareness of the value of grace, an internal sense, and not just intellectual comprehension. We must be conscious that we are all children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit.
3. Life is continually growing. It is not sufficient to just be conscious of God as a concept. Our relationship with God must be real and expanding. We either grow or we decline. We cannot remain still. One of the principal reasons for failing to grow in our new life with God is that we do not wish to change. We like the comfortable feeling we have with things as they are and are afraid we might lose it. Refusing to change is refusing to grow. We will wilt and fade as the grain of wheat died because its roots were not in good soil. Growth is a lifelong process. This idea of continued growth will be developed throughout all of the remaining talks.

4. Life is shared, giving of ourselves to others. The Ideal talk presented self-giving as a measure of a person's growth and maturity. This self-giving is an essential aspect of authentic piety. We are channels of God's grace to others. We must not try to remake others into our image and likeness. We are to have the willingness to accept people where they are and the empathy to share their journey.

Sharing means listening to others and includes sharing our most precious gift, our time. Sharing means learning to "walk a mile in their shoes," to have empathy. Sharing is part of God's plan for us. God helps each of us to give of ourselves to others and to reach more fully our potential as human beings. Sharing is God's channel of grace for others and us. Sharing means to be open to people and their pain and their joy. We share their burdens and give joy to their hearts (Galatians 6:2).

- B. This section is the very heart of the Piety talk. "Directing our whole life to God" is the key phrase of the Piety talk. The conscious and growing life of grace, complete Christianity, is nothing other than a life wholly directed to God.

This section of the Piety talk can be the place where one's **personal testimony** begins, where the speaker tells how s/he has realized the importance of God and the necessity of changing his/her life, directing it to God. For some speakers, it can also be effective to begin one's personal testimony following the discussion of false piety. This can provide an opportunity for the speaker to share his/her own previously held notions of false piety, and how they impacted his/her life. No matter where a speaker's personal testimony begins, the primary impact of the section on authentic piety is the telling of one's own faith story, i.e. personal witness and testimony.

The most important concept in the Piety talk is: "Genuine and authentic piety is the direction of our whole life to God." The main purpose of the talk is to make this point and to give an insight, through personal testimony, into what it means to direct one's whole life to God. The meaning of the phrase "directing our whole life to God" (and what the speaker has to bring out in his/her testimony) is that God is our father, our creator, our Lord, our Savior, our helper and teacher. Life is intended to be lived in personal relationship with Him. He comes first in our lives. It is a simple point, but the most important point and is the basis of Christian life.

1. It is possible to live the life of piety today. God did not just call some historical characters 2000 years ago. He calls **us** today! Individuals living today can and do respond fully to God's call. Each of us knows people living today who accept and strive to live the Christian ideal

more fully by accepting the challenge of God's call to them. There are people living today, living all around us, who strive to discern God's plan for their lives so that they can become all that God created them to be. Many people in our midst strive to develop their Christian calling more fully by empathizing with others and sharing their burdens. This frees people to grow closer to God.

These people accept responsibility for the world God has placed in their hands. They respond in disciplined prayer to the Father. They respond to Christ and his challenge to bear fruit (John 15:5) and his urging to "go into the whole world to preach the gospel." (Mark 16:15) They respond to the Holy Spirit's urging and counsel (John 14:25-26). They respond to the needs of humanity in its search for truth, justice, peace and happiness.

Lives directed to God and dedicated to Christ have been lived throughout history, and today is no exception. We don't have to belong to any new movement to be a Christian. We are not here to Via de Cristo-ize the world. What we are saying here is not new, but is the old, old story of Jesus and His love, a love that calls us to respond in the same way as all baptized people throughout history. Even if a participant rejects the Via de Cristo method, s/he should not reject the nature of his/her own call to live in an active and dynamic relationship with God in Christ Jesus. God chose each of us in baptism for this purpose. By responding to this gift of grace, each person can be God's messenger to the world.

There are many saints living in our world who reach out to help others in need. Only by reaching out, by daring to open up our lives to others, and by letting them into our hearts, will we become like Christ. Only then will His joy be ours and our joy be complete. (John 15:11)

2. The outline explains in two ways what it means to direct the whole of our life to God. The first is by revealing the different aspects of things that are to be directed to God. Each person's life is the totality of his/her human actions. In each human action, three things are present: knowing, wanting, and doing. Therefore, if the whole of our life is directed to God, one's knowing, wanting and doing are directed by God.
 - a. Knowing. We need to know what our Christian life should be, and why it should be that way. In other words, we should know God and know what God teaches. We should see things the way God sees them. When our knowledge centers on God, God directs our knowing.
 - b. Wanting. The ability to set direction for one's life. This is the

emotional drive that spurs us to action. Wanting becomes loving when God directs it. This means that we should love God. The first and the greatest commandment is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” (Matthew 22:37). When our wanting is directed to God, we love God with everything we are, and love Him so much that we want to act according to His will.

- c. Doing. We do what God wants. This is like stepping on the gas, getting our will moving, converting our plans into realities, and hurdling obstacles. We actually live a life directed to God. “He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me” (John 14:21).

C. The second way the outline explains the meaning of directing our whole life to God is by explaining that piety is an ideal. At this point, the Piety talk builds upon the groundwork that was laid in the Ideal talk. An ideal is the sum total of ideas that arouse our will and inspire us to reach some new or greater potential. Piety is a real ideal as it is the sum total of our life lived as God intended. Piety is life dedicated to living in relationship with God and responding to this relationship by serving Him. To live for God is the only real and desirable ideal for every believer. A loving personal relationship with God provides unity and direction for our lives. Living in this relationship, directing all we have and all we are to God, should become the most important thing in our life. Every idea we have, every plan or goal we adopt, should be used to reach a deeper orientation to God. As we consciously live this life in grace, we see ourselves as children of God and becoming the saints we already are.

The impact of the Authentic Piety section is through telling one’s own faith story, i.e., personal witness and testimony.

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTHENTIC PIETY

Courage, naturalness, and vibrant life are the marks of authentic piety. They reveal the level of spiritual maturity in a person. This section explores the lifestyle of the person who lives a life directed to God and emphasizes that the Christian is truly human.

- A. Courage is not foolishness. Rather it is the mark of one who will do what is right because it is the right thing to do.
 - 1. To be Christ’s disciple requires that we are not afraid to let God’s grace work through us. It takes courage to open up our minds and hearts to another, to make ourselves vulnerable to someone who may rebuff us. It takes courage to break down the walls of self-protection, prejudice,

selfishness and fear. It takes courage to forgive someone who has hurt us. It takes courage to take the time to understand and empathize with others and not demand that they come to Christ our way. My response to being Christian must be courageous.

2. The world's idea of courage is different from a Christian's because the courage we speak of does not always lead to victory or success in this world. Look at Jesus. He died an apparent failure but lived a life of tremendous courage, not afraid to go against the current. If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31b)
3. The kind of courage to which God calls each of us means we should be unafraid to stand up against evil, to speak on behalf of justice, and to call others to their full potential, even if it involves risks. (Micah 6:8) It takes courage to care about others and to reach out. It takes courage to pray and search out our path to God. It takes courage to live life as fully as we can at any given time in our lives.

B. Just as we need to be courageous in the name of Christ, it is vital that everything we do as Christians be natural. People living the life of authentic piety should stand out only because of the love they have for God and for others. (John 13:35)) If we are to attract people to Christ, our lives must be attractive to others. Jesus was an enormously attractive person, and His love and concern for others permeates the Gospels.

We are to live ordinary lives. We must seek to know the concerns of others -- their fears, worries and joys. As we meet them, we can share with them in a meaningful way. The mark of people whose lives imitate Christ is gentleness, humility, love and concern. It is not necessary to do anything extraordinary or to stand out in the crowd as a sign of our Christianity. Indeed, such actions could be the sign of our own ego, and not the call of Christ.

1. Ours is the ordinary life made extraordinary through God's power in us. Our Christian attitude, mentality and being must be integrated into everything we do.
2. Our lives as Christians are normal lives. Jesus Christ kept most of the customs of His day, obeying the laws of the society in which He lived.
3. The life of natural piety means that we are courageous enough to stand up for God. Our aim is not to drive people away or turn them off by being too pushy or excessive in our zeal. Be imitators of Christ.
4. Let us walk what we talk. Let the testimony of our lives be consistent with our beliefs.

C. Ordinary life lived to the fullest is not dull; it is exciting and rich. It encompasses the ordinary events of life but contains Christ-like dimensions

that would otherwise be missed. As our faith deepens and grows, we sense a new meaning to each part of life. We grasp new potentials and realize new talents and ways of living that God has created in us. We sense a new awakening in life, one with heightened purpose and fulfillment. We discover we are being called to persevere and grow to new heights.

1. We discover that life becomes richer as we grow in our relationships with others. We discover that our corner of the world has been given into our care. Life, lived deeply and fully, is exciting and stimulating, and our faith will show forth in all we do. Only by being fully human and embracing all of life can we be the active saints God has called us to be.
2. We discover anew the depth and complexity of other people around us and realize that they, too, have been called by God to reach their full human and spiritual potential. Faith, when lived as the essence of our being, fills our lives with strength and vitality that others will find attractive and will want to imitate.
3. Our faith lived deeply and fully, will overflow in all our relationships: with God, with self, with family, with coworkers, with friends, and with those who believe themselves to be enemies.

The speaker's personal witness should continue in this section and contain more witness and examples for the participants to see how these characteristics are actually lived. The witness in this section might be brief, leading to the major personal witness as part of Section VI, the Conclusion. The speaker's personal testimony might be presented in larger sections, or broken up and interspersed throughout the talk. Personal testimony should follow the points presented in the Suggestions for Preparing this Talk. This testimony, however, should support and bring to life the various concepts presented in the sections on Authentic Piety.

V. ACTS OF AUTHENTIC PIETY

This short section lays out what ordinary people can do to strengthen their relationship with God. The purpose of this section is to preview Sunday's talk on the Life in Grace. It shows the participants that while our vision is high and our goals mighty, there is no secret way of living the life of authentic piety that they haven't heard about before. The practices of piety nourish our relationship with God, as they are our concrete and visible responses to God's love for us.

A. The major point to be made is that the various practices of piety are not piety in themselves.

1. Piety is not those things that we do. The various practices of piety are not piety but are ways of deepening our relationship with God.
2. The practices of piety, such as worship, prayer and Christian service to

others, flow out of our relationship with God and nourish it. Life must be approached from the perspective that all we do is part of our response to God's call.

Illustrate how practices of piety enable you to live a life of authentic piety.

VI. CONCLUSION

The talk ends on an upbeat, hopeful note. The personal testimony of the speaker shows a living example of authentic piety and witnesses to the truth that this life can be lived. The outcome of authentic piety is the peace of God. Choose illustrations for your own testimony.

God didn't promise us a life free from pain and strife, only that we would not have to walk through life alone. As we direct our whole life to God, our intimate, revitalizing, deepening relationship with Him impacts every area of our lives. When our response to God's gift of grace is a life of authentic piety, Christ's joy is born anew in us, and through us.

This morning you were asked to examine yourself and your ideal. God's ideal for each of us is the life of authentic piety. Living the life of authentic piety is a choice. This life is meant for you. God says that He has set before us life and death. Christ is offering you this gift of life, a full life, and it is yours for the asking. ASK NOW! Choose life, then, live life as God intended. Love the Lord your God, listening to His voice, and hold fast to Him.

This talk contains the testimony of the speaker's faith story wherever it is given. It concludes with the challenge to the participants to turn to God.