

CFC Novice Lesson 1: Poverty

Focus	Why is this vow not about money?
Reflection	<p>I like the idea of vows being icons. Neither vows nor icons are an end in themselves but have the purpose of opening up a viewpoint into the Divine. The icon and vow are passages to the sacred. Vows seem essential as guideposts in my life. Though there is a personal expression there is also an ageless sense that these vows have been lived for centuries. They give me living roots of stability in a very changing world and a belief that some things do not change. The rooted nature of the vows flies in the face of a world that strives for obtaining and satisfying the contemporary hungers: power, privilege, status, and wealth. The vows challenge me to look deeper into the values of life: trust, honesty, truth, compassion, citizenship, love.</p> <p>It is very easy to define the vow of poverty in simple economic terms: we are to have no money. The first baggage of this definition that needs to go is seeing poverty as only economic. There is no value in destitution. There is value in knowing what is important and what has value. Poverty isn't about our relationship with money. It is about our relationship with God and other people. Money is a tool. It does not fulfill the hungers of life: love, companionship, and meaning. Francis developed a trusting relationship with God: he had faith that God would provide the daily bread needed for sustenance. That sustenance came in many forms: sisters and brothers, shelter, food, ministry, courage, vision, and many more "breads." Poverty was formed in the reliance on God who is loving us right now.</p>
Lectio	The prophet Jeremiah (17:7-8) writes: <i>Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.</i>
Lectio Prompts	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How are trust and faith the same?2. Do we trust God or do we trust in God?3. What does it feel like to be in a drought and trust that rain will come?4. Are your roots sent out to the ever-flowing stream?

Answer only the following questions:

Journaling: Give an example of how trusting God takes shape in your vow of poverty.

Conclusion: Please write a brief description of how this lesson has impacted your life.

Resources:

CFC Novice Lesson 2: Chastity

Focus:	How can I be a sexual person and have a vow of chastity?
Reflection:	<p>Chastity is another word for faithful love or charity. Celibacy is an aspect of Chastity that excludes any sexual intimacy with another. We vow chastity and some in our community choose to be celibate. All of us are to be chaste and that is to be faithful and respectful to others as God is faithful to us. All our loving relationships are a gift, not a tool. We don't use people for our own selfish needs or ends.</p> <p>Chastity calls us out of ourselves to be in a relationship with others. Sometimes this relationship includes sexual intimacy. Chastity isn't a statement against sexuality: it is a statement that aligns our sexual expression with the certain knowledge and belief in the Incarnation. God has dwelt among us in human flesh. We are sexual beings and our sexuality is a gift from God.</p> <p>Fear can enter our relationships. A person can learn to fear relationships. Maybe the fear is one of intimacy born in the roots of abuse or abandonment. Perhaps fear has come from broken dreams or unfulfilled loves. Alcohol has become a companion for many whose emotions are ruled by fear and distrust. Food can be the orgasm of a lonely life. Chastity calls us to overcome our fear of relationships.</p> <p>Chastity is about mutual, respectful, faithful love. This vow centers itself on God's love. Our love is marked by gentleness, mutuality, respect, and dignity. Chastity calls us to approach people as a gift of God. We approach others with a sense of awe, and kindness, and love. In its simplest form chastity is kindness.</p>
Lectio:	<p>In the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (I Cor 13:4-13) we envision: <i>Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now, we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.</i></p>
	<p>Lectio Reflection Prompts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Love is patient and kind. 2. Knowledge will end.

Answer only the following questions:

1. **Journaling:** When you have pondered the vow of chastity how does it fit into the Great Commandment: Love God and love neighbor as self?
2. **Conclusion:** Please write a brief description of how this lesson has impacted your life.

Resources:

CFC Novice Lesson 3: Obedience

Focus:	Am I listening to the Gospel?
Reflection:	<p>The vow of obedience reminds us that God is within and without all of us. Obedience calls us to listen for God in the beauty of creation and the hearts of our neighbors. To approach the world with open-heartedness and humility is to believe that God’s Desire will be made known to me as I love and minister to others. A good dose of humility helps me keep from being so full of myself that I cannot listen to others. I am being obedient when I am listening, and ready, and able, and respond to the call of God heard mostly in the voices of my brothers and sisters.</p> <p>One of the roles in our community is to help others listen and discern God’s will for us. This takes trust and active participation. Our siblings call us to live out the vocation that God has given us. We help each other discern how to live the Gospel life.</p> <p>In listening for God’s Desire we will also hear a lot of static noise. We can be distracted by various types of media, our internal dialogues, our presumptions, and the superficial gossip that floats around us. We may want to cling to a romantic idea of Francis, Clare, or Jesus. Another source of noise is the one that because we have always done it one way that there isn’t a new and better way for us to discover. We can get stuck in our comfortable patterns and habits. Our vocation is a continuous calling forth into the fullness of life. Obedience calls us to the edge of where we are growing and that edge is sometimes very uncomfortable. It is a challenge to know that we are listening to the truth. Obedience always calls us to love more deeply. We are obedient when we live our Rule and follow the Gospel.</p>
Lectio	<p><i>I Jn 3:21-24 I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and you know that no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father.</i></p>
	<p>Lectio Prompts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The truth about Jesus is in us. 2. To confess faith in Jesus is to confess faith in the Creator, our loving parent. 3. Abiding (staying with, living with) Jesus is how we remain obedient

Answer only the following questions:

1. Journal Question: How do you know that you are living the Gospel as Jesus proclaimed it? This journal prompt may take some time to ponder. The essence of this lesson is to discover both the comfort and the challenge of living the Gospel with a vow of obedience. A further reflection might lead you to ponder how your siblings inform your understanding of the Gospel.
2. Conclusion: Please write a brief description of how this lesson has impacted your life.

Resources:

CFC Novice Lesson 4: Contemporary Expression/Way of Life

Focus:	How are my vows lived today?
Reflection:	<p>Our vows are ancient focal points found in the Gospel. The vows represent collective wisdom, motivation, and expression that are brought forth by each generation of the faithful who live the Gospel. We face this challenge in our own lives. Vows are not static, nor are they impersonal. Vows are a deep response to the love of God and take an intimate means of personal and communal expression. We cannot mimic past expressions and be authentic any more than we can love God exactly the way someone else has loved God. Living our vows today, in the daily soup of our lives, brings us to an authentic expression of them. Our vows are only as authentic as we are. Vows are like wearing glasses: we have to actively put them on to see more clearly. When examining the world through the lens of our vows the world begins to change. If poverty teaches us reliance on God, and chastity teaches us faithfulness even in adversity, and obedience teaches us to listen to what is beyond our egos, then we begin to live out our lives that express love for all. Poverty isn't about having things, chastity isn't about no sex, obedience isn't blind. Today I have the opportunity to live my life in a way that is consistent with the exclamation of Francis: "My God, my all."</p>
Lectio	<p><i>Eph 3:14-21 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth, takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us can accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.</i></p>
	<p>Lectio Prompts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. We are a family that has taken the name given to us by God, our creator.2. My vows "root and ground" me in the love of God.3. I am being filled with the fullness of God.

Answer only the following questions:

Journal Questions:

1. Reflect and give examples of how you live your vows today.
2. How would people know that you are a vowed religious by your actions?
3. Do your vows deepen your love for God and your neighbor?

You have almost finished your first year of the novitiate. Please write a letter to the Guardian and reflect on what you have learned about yourself, your siblings, and your community. Most importantly reflect on how you have learned to love God, your neighbor, and yourself more deeply. These letters (emails) are due by March 30th.

CFC Novice Lesson 5: Contemporary Challenges

Focus:	The novice is to describe how the vows challenge them to live the Gospel.
Reflection:	<p>If vows help us see the world more clearly and root us in the Love of God, then we will also discover where it is most difficult for us to live our vows. It is a challenge to bring what we do into alignment with what we say we are. For example, being judgmental of others doesn't fit with being a Franciscan. Racism, elitism, entitlement, pride: none of these fit with a Christian vocation. Franciscans are known for gentleness, kindness, acceptance, and love.</p> <p>Living our vows can point out our strengths and weaknesses. We can begin to see that there is a difference between the ideal of the Gospel and the reality of our lives. We can approach this difference in two ways. One way is to focus on our failed actions – call it sin - and wallow around in what bad Franciscans we are. The other, and much more gospel-oriented approach, is to learn how to be more loving. We are not expected to be perfect as Franciscans. We are expected to accept what is and continue to work at loving God and our neighbor. The good news is that the vows, even in pointing out our weaknesses, call us to rely on the good and plentiful grace of God for our healing and strength.</p> <p>There will always be a creative tension between the ideal of the Gospel and the reality of our lives. It is in that tension that the Holy Spirit renews us and transforms us. Living the Gospel is like learning how to dance. We must learn some of the most basic steps (vows) and then put them into practice. It only becomes a dance when we are willing to trust our partner (God). If we focus on how many toes have been stepped on while dancing, we will stop dancing. If we focus on the sheer joy of the dance and the harmony of movement between partners, then we will dance forever. Or maybe less romantic: you can't learn to ride a bike without falling off and scraping your knees. If you think about your scabby knees you won't ride again. If you focus on the joy of the ride.... Get back up, and get going!</p>
Lectio	<p>Isaiah 55:8-12 <i>For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the hungry, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.</i></p>
	<p>Lectio Prompts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We are learning God's ways 2. God's word will accomplish God's purpose 3. We are sent out in joy and return in peace

Answer only the following questions:

1. **Journal Question:** How have my vows taught me to focus on God's love? How have my vows changed my life? How have my vows changed the lives of others?

2. **Conclusion:** Please write a brief description of how this lesson has impacted your life.