



THE ANTI-GRADUATION

EXISTENCE OF GOD

LIFE NIGHT OUTLINE

CATECHISM

36 - 39

50 - 53

156 - 159

SCRIPTURE

Luke 9:24

Romans 5:1-6

Ephesians 5:1 -20

KEY CONCEPTS

Faith is a gift given to God's people to help us along the Christian journey.

As disciples we are called to deeper prayer, study and reflection about who God is. This is a journey that never ends.

We can know God through faith (heart), reason (head) and experience (witness).

GOAL OF THIS NIGHT

The goal of this Life Night is to help the teens understand that God is revealed through our faith, reason and experience. This night will also show the teens that faith is a life-long journey that does not end after high school (or Confirmation).

ABOUT THIS NIGHT

This Life Night is the last night of the semester on the Person of Christ. This Life Night seeks to help the teens understand that God can be known, and the Church gives us the tools to understand this. This Life Night also helps the teens understand that the journey of faith does not end with high school (or Confirmation). The Life Night begins with short spoof on the idea that we can “graduate” from learning more about God and our faith. The competition leads into a teaching on knowing God’s existence through faith, reason and experience. The Break is a large group question and answer time for the teens. The Q&A will not only answer the questions but show the teens how to find the answers themselves. The night will end by giving the teens an opportunity to encounter Christ once again in Eucharistic Adoration.

PARENTAL NOTICE

The Life Night for this week wraps up the semester of the Person of Christ. The night focused on knowing God exists using faith, reason and experience. This night also stressed the idea that faith is a life-long journey, not something that we can “graduate” from. Take a few minutes this week to dive deeper into this topic at home. Here are a few discussion questions to use:

1. What was one or two things you learned this semester about the Person of Jesus that you did not know before?
2. How in your life have you seen evidence that God exists?
3. How has your faith helped you in times of doubt? How have you been able to hold onto your faith instead of giving up?

ENVIRONMENT

This environment for this night is a Graduation Party. Have streamers, fake diplomas, graduation hats, balloons, etc. strung around the room. Make the environment as festive as possible. As the teens enter, have the Core Members congratulating the teens for “graduating” from this semester of Life Nights. If possible, have some Core Members dressed in cap and gown. If you serve food before the Life Night, have cake and other “party food” available.

GATHER

GRADUATION CEREMONY

(10 min)

A Core Member (dressed in cap and gown) will gather the group together and welcome them to the Life Teen graduation ceremony. He or she should give a short speech about how proud the Core Team is of the teens. This should be an over-the-top, ridiculous speech about how the teens have learned everything they need to know about God in this semester and have no more to discover about who God is. If possible, create a few “awards” to give out to teens, such as “most likely to interrupt a talk,” “most likely to be a saint,” “most likely to eat all the food at Life Night,” etc. Have a few mock-diplomas created and ready to pass out to the teens. Have fun with this and make it as “tongue in cheek” as possible.

ANTI-GRADUATION

(5 min)

Right before the Core Member begins to pass out diplomas to the teens, the youth minister should break in and interrupt. He/she should tell the Core Member that there is no such thing as graduating from faith formation. This semester was just the beginning of a life-long discovery of who God is and how He works in our lives. The youth minister should then bring up the person who will be giving the proclaim and transition into the teaching.

PROCLAIM

"THE ANTI-GRADUATION" TEACHING

(10 min)

The teaching for this night helps the teens explore the idea that even though we may not be able to see God, we can know that He exists through revelation, Tradition and the creation around us. The teaching also explains the role of the gift of faith and how we can lean on it in times of doubt.

GOD: ARE YOU THERE?

Everyone wants to be sure of what they know. Many times we question things we've been taught when it is difficult to see the proof. When we see an illusionist saw a person in half, we know what we see is contrary to what we know is really possible, and we want an explanation. When it comes to the larger things of this world, man has always been curious. Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going? How should we be living? These have always been the great questions of humanity. We can find many answers to these questions in the world around us, but ultimately we come up short of explaining everything. Science has helped us understand how a great deal of our world works but still hasn't been able to answer the question of why. Inevitably, if enough time is spent, man faces the realization of God's existence whether by his own investigation or by God's direct intervention. Many today easily doubt what is true and demand many forms of proof if they are to believe in something they cannot see. I can't see the harmfulness of plutonium, but I know its power by its effects. So how are we to believe in God who we cannot see? Why are stories about Jesus relevant to me today? What is the meaning of it all?

REVELATION: GOD'S GIFT OF HIMSELF

Human beings have existed for thousands of years, and in every culture, there has been a religion. Man is a religious being by nature. In all civilizations, there has been some sense of a power greater than man. People know that they do not exist because of anything that they control. Men and women do not make the sun rise or the birds fly. People cannot escape death, yet they universally believe that it is rational to estimate that the human person's life does not necessarily end in death. How can this be? How can the ancient cultures of Egypt, India, Rome, Greece and the others decide that there had to be some god in order to explain the world? How do all these cultures believe that there can be an afterlife? The coincidences are overwhelming.

CCC 44

It is purely reasonable that all the things of this world—all the beings, all the planets, all the stars, everything—had to have been created in order to exist. Science has told us a great deal about our universe,

CCC 156 - 159

but it cannot answer of the origins of life and the world we see. Even the “Big-Bang Theory” presupposes that something already was in existence that went “bang!” The agenda of many scientists is to prove that there is no God, as if it would be a monumental achievement and ensure the liberation of humanity, but evidence proves otherwise. Every culture has shown the desire to know God. Every culture has seen how it is rational to believe that there is a god, and in the Christian faith, we have discovered that the true God is not contrary to human reason, but rather completes it.

Our human experience also plays a significant role in understanding that there is a god, as long as we don't undercut our experience by limiting our human reason. “The human mind...is hampered in the attaining of such truths, not only by the impact of the senses and the imagination, but also by disordered appetites, which are the consequences of original sin. So it happens that men in such matters easily persuade themselves that what they would not like to be true is false or at least doubtful.” Many who deny there is a god do so because the way they choose to live their life is contradictory to the ways of the Lord, but the perception of God by these individuals is skewed from reality. The Venerable Fulton J. Sheen is noted to have said that, “There are not over a hundred people in the United States who hate the Catholic Church. There are millions, however, who hate what they wrongly believe to be the Catholic Church.”

CCC 36 - 39

God is knowable through the means He gives us in His revelation. This revelation is a gift He freely gives. The coming of Jesus Christ into this world was not for His benefit but for ours. Man is able to know God through revelation because revelation makes sense to human reason. Because God is true, knowledge of Him ought to, and does, make sense. Though God is infinitely greater than what we are capable of understanding, we can know Him easily by use of our reason applied to what He has revealed to us. “By natural reason man can know God with certainty, on the basis of his works. But there is another order of knowledge, which man cannot possibly arrive at by his won powers: the order of divine Revelation.”

CCC 50

Creation Testifies to the Creator

One of the most undeniable examples of God's existence and providence is the natural world around us. Have you ever considered things like if the earth were any closer or further from the Sun, we wouldn't have life on this planet? Or even something like how cells work or the multiple complex systems in the human body? All of

these things are ordered; meaning that their existence is based on a pattern of laws and functions—they are not random. If you took a box of puzzle pieces and emptied the pieces onto the floor, they would never fall into a completed puzzle. For the picture to come into being, a person has to work out the task with their brain, using their intelligence. The random tossing of pieces can't do the job required.

Because order cannot emerge from randomness, it's right to assume that there must be some creator of the things we see that exist in the order of nature. Where do notebook computers come from? Or cell phones? Or skyscrapers? If I told you that one day, a long time ago, something happened that I can't fully explain, but through the course of time, all the right pieces came together and voila—there's your laptop! What would your response be?

I wouldn't be taken seriously. We all know that something as complicated as a laptop, an iPod or a car can't just come into being on their own, so it makes logical sense that something as delicate and prevalent as life cannot just exist apart from some designer or creator. This is why "we believe that God created the world according to his wisdom. It is not the product of...blind fate or chance. We believe that it proceeds from God's free will; he wanted to make his creatures share in his being, wisdom and goodness."

CCC 295

Just as a sculptor leaves his mark or his fingerprints in his artwork, so, too, our Creator leaves His mark on His creation. "We believe 'because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived'." The wisdom of a designer is present within the world because of the witness of creation and the truth of the Creator.

CCC 156

The world around you is not the only rational proof of God. The world within you can be just as revealing. Why is it that people from all over the world, although uniquely different from each other, are near identical in so many ways? There seems to be some commonality among all people in all places at all times, especially in cases of what is deemed "right" and what is deemed "wrong." This intrinsic attitude among humanity is called the **natural law**. "The natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie." Pope Leo XIII explains: "The natural law is written and engraved in the soul of each and every man, because it is human reason ordaining him to do good and forbidding him to sin"

CCC 1954

Everyone knows it's wrong to do certain things. We know it's wrong to hurt, injure or kill an innocent person. We know it's wrong to take something that rightfully belongs to another. We also know that it's right to help people and protect the innocent. Even if someone had to tell us these truths, we know them to be true once we have had them explained to us. A child doesn't know that $3 \times 5 = 15$, but that truth is undeniable and believed undoubtedly once it is made known to the individual. A person may not be born knowing that it's wrong to take what isn't theirs, but once it happens to them, they realize that something wrong has happened to them, and the natural law is realized. This is what is written on the heart of every person and is evident in people's compulsion to follow it or to make excuses for not following it.

CCC 1960 - 20

If we extrapolate what it means that there is natural law, we will have to ask ourselves of its origin. Where did it come from? How is it that it is universal? What ought our response to it be? The natural law is rational and ordered and nothing ordered can exist without having its genesis apart from some rational being. What rational being can create life and instill in it the ability to act in accordance to true principles that are intrinsically good? This is another proof of God. Only God can be the answer for this truth.

TRADITION: GOD'S MESSAGE PRESERVED

Because God wants to be known by all men, and even though the full deposit of revelation is found within the Catholic Church, we can reason that men and women of other faiths are able to know something about God. The Jewish people were God's chosen people in ancient history and received the first part of revelation. They were the ones through whom the Savior would be born, but other cultures at the time believed in gods. Other cultures had religions because some truth of God is evident in creation.

CCC 39

"In defending the ability of human reason to know God, the Church is expressing her confidence in the possibility of speaking about Him to all men and with all men, and therefore of dialogue with other religions, with philosophy and science, as well as with unbelievers and atheists."

As Catholics we find the truth of God revealed through Sacred

CCC 50 - 53

Scripture and Sacred Tradition. We have come to believe in our faith because of those who have come before us, such as the saints of the Church, our parents and all the holy men and women from the time of the apostles to today. Men and women have died for their faith and their love for the Lord. We call these people martyrs, which means “witness.” Their death serves as testimony that what they believed was true. Tertullian, a second-century theologian, professed that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church, meaning that the willingness of so many to die rather than deny the truth of God is evidence of God’s existence realized in their lives. “Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose...to the truth of the faith and of Christian doctrine.”

CCC 76

CCC 828

CCC 857

CCC 2473

The mission of the Church is to unite all peoples to God. Christ established her in order to accomplish this task. In her, we find Him. She is the Communion of Saints that has preserved the truth of revelation over the centuries. The Magisterium is entrusted with protecting the truth. Catechists, teachers and educators have formally taught and instructed the faithful in the ways of the Church. Parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles have always brought new family members to God in the Church and in raising their families have passed on the truth of God that they once found in their own life experiences. Our understanding of God and our sense of Church begins at home. This is why the family is called a “domestic church.” It’s where we first learn and the context in which we first experience the world in which we live.

CCC 85

CCC 1655 - 1658

Other Christian faiths have also done their part in preserving the message of Christ, if so in part. In spreading the Gospel, they, too, play a part in turning sinners hearts away from death and the snares of the devil and towards the goodness and the warmth of God’s mercy and compassion.

KEEPING THE FAITH

The knowledge of God’s existence can be demonstrated in the ways we’ve previously mentioned; through history, revelation, the Church, witness of the martyrs, nature, natural law and through human reason. There is another way that we can know of God’s existence. It is the hardest to use as proof but the easiest to understand once realized. Faith.

Faith is a word used liberally in religious talk, but what is faith? Faith is the belief in, or trust in, something supernatural that does not entirely lower itself to our meet our natural understanding. When we get into the car and fire up the G.P.S. to take us to a place we've never been, we stick to the route the G.P.S. plans for us. Even if we don't understand how it knows, we have faith that it will take us there, and all we have to do is follow in order to prove that it was right all along. Faith in God works similarly. Using what we can know about Him, He invites us to have faith and to enter into deeper knowledge of and communion with Him. This presupposes that we believe that there is a God, which is why it can be difficult for many to appreciate. Luckily for those who believe in God, faith is not too much more to ask.

“By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God. With his whole being man gives up his assent to God the revealer.” Faith is surrender. The father of our faith, Abraham, taught us this. God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son and Abraham obeyed, trusting that God would not deceive him. Abraham's son was spared as a result of his faith. In the Letter to the Hebrews, we learn that, “without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Again, it can be difficult to have faith at first, because you have to believe in God to begin with, but its rewards are endless.

Genesis 22:1 -24

Hebrews 11:6

CCC 143

Faith is made possible because of God as well, “Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him. ‘Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him.’” Once this grace is received, the individual must choose to use it. God installs the G.P.S. in your car, turns it on and maps out the route for you. If you want to find your way, you have to decide to use it. Once you've used it and found your way because of it, it's easy to see that it was right the whole time. Faith is always certain and only seems a mystery to us while we are on our way. “Faith is certain. It is more certain than all human knowledge because it is founded on the very word of God, who cannot lie. To be sure, revealed truths can seem obscure to human reason and experience, but ‘the certainty that the divine light gives is greater than that which the light of natural reason gives.’ ‘Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt.’”

CCC 157

Of all the ways in which we can prove God's existence, what good is it unless we have experienced it? We can know how a chocolate cake is made, but unless we've enjoyed its goodness, what good is

Luke 9:24

it? Faith is what takes us from the realm of intellectual belief in God and launches us into communion with Him. "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it." Faith is this journey towards Christ and the proof of His love.

BREAK

LARGE GROUP QUESTION AND ANSWER

(25 min)

Before the Life Night, give the teens an opportunity to write down/email/text questions about the faith that they would like to have answered. Prior to the Life Night, go through the questions and pick eight to 10 questions to discuss. Bring together a panel of Core Members, the youth minister, priests, deacon, religious sisters and/or parents to answer the questions. Instead of only giving the answers, have the panel show the teens how they went about finding the answer. Teach the teens to use the Bible and Catechism. This will help them understand how to look up answers for themselves. Explain big words in terms that the teens can understand. To open the Q&A, the youth minister should explain that the faith journey is a life-long journey of discovering who God is and what He has revealed. The journey does not stop after we leave youth group or receive Confirmation.

SEND

RECAP OF LIFE NIGHT AND SEMESTER

(5 min)

The youth minister should wrap up the large group and recap the night and semester. He/She should give a brief summary of each Life Night and the challenges made. Spend a few minutes asking the teens to share what they have learned over the course of the semester and how their faith has been strengthened. Ask specifically how the teens have grown through reason (head knowledge), faith (heart) and experience (witness).

ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

(25 min)

This semester ends the same way it started, with a time of Eucharistic Adoration. Use this as an opportunity to highlight that God continues to reveal Himself to us. We never stop discovering more about Him, His love and His will for our lives. If possible, move the group into the chapel or church for this time of prayer. Have the Blessed Sacrament already exposed before they enter. Before entering, explain to the teens that this is the real “anti-graduation” ceremony. The more time we spend with Christ, the more we realize that there is more to discover about Him. Invite the teens to bring to Christ everything they learned this semester and everything they still want to know. If possible, invite the music minister to lead worship during this time. After Benediction, close the time of prayer by praying the Hail Mary and Ave Maria.

CONCLUSION

ADAPTING THIS NIGHT

For smaller youth groups, send a graduation invitation to each teen as a way of inviting them to the Life Night.

Give each teen a Catechism and teach them to use it during the large group part of the night. If possible, take up a collection from the parish to buy each teen a Catechism.

GOING DEEPER

Have one night during the week over the next few weeks to answer the rest of the questions collected during the semester. Help the teens discover the answer on their own and spend time discussing the answers.

Coordinate with the RCIA director to meet with any teens who are interested in becoming Catholic.