



## Knowing my Value

made for relationship

You are not self-sufficient. You exist because God wills you to exist. His love holds you in existence at every moment. If God stopped loving you, you wouldn't simply disappear; it would be as if you never existed in the first place. Without your relationship with God, you would not "be". This relationship began at the moment of your conception when He said "Let him be" or "Let her be", and it will continue for eternity.

God also said, "It is not good that the man should be alone;" (Gen 2:18). God also wills you to be in relationship with others— with your family, your friends, your community. This is part of our nature as human beings made in the image and

likeness of God. God is Trinity, a community of three Persons. By His very nature He is in relationship, and He wants us also to be in relationships too – with Himself and with other human beings.

We know that experiencing unhappy family relationships or a lack of good friendships can cause people to feel lonely, isolated, hurt, or even depressed. In these situations, it is easy to forget our primary relationship with God and to believe that we are completely alone in the world. **The truth is that we are never truly alone.**

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less part of the body....The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greatest honor...If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (1 Cor 12-15; 21-23. 26)

God created all members of the human race as one big family, as one "body". That is why Jesus became a human, to gather back the scattered human race and unite us in His own body. As He said Himself, He came – *"so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you"* (Jn 17:23) We may often feel isolated, but **it is a fact** that no matter where we are or what we do, we are an essential member of one human body, connected with each other person across time and space.

Each human being on earth is connected in the family of God. Each person, unique in his or her gifts, talents, and abilities, is necessary in the Body of Christ. We may think toes are weird, but good luck walking or standing without them. You may think your friends' siblings are weird, but they are just as essential in the Body of Christ as your toes are in your body. And if your toes and your friends' siblings are essential, so also are you. Without each person present and being who they were created to be by God, the Body suffers. When each and all are thriving as they ought to be, "all rejoice together."

## Loneliness

Despite the reality of the Body of Christ, many people still feel lonely or isolated at times. Loneliness is less about the number of friends you have, or likes and shares on social media, than it is about how you feel. Even the most popular and outgoing people can feel intensely alone. And, while some people are happy to spend their time solo, others may feel very isolated and lonely, even when they are part of a group or larger social circle. Loneliness is a personal perception that doesn't depend on how involved you may appear in social networks, whether 'virtual' or in person.

Feeling left out or lonely happens to all of us from time to time. The feelings associated with this---sadness, frustration, relief, puzzlement---are all common and normal to experience. But when negative feelings of being alone take over and persist, then a person may be more prone to very upsetting thoughts and despair. They may forget that they are still an essential part of the Body of Christ.



**How can you learn to recognize when one of your classmates or friends might be feeling isolated or alone?**

Psychologists have found that certain life experiences can increase the risk of experiencing isolation– some examples are: being the new kid at school, struggling with gender identity or sexual attraction, having a family in crisis, or being bullied. Do you notice someone who never participates in class or stays behind rather than join the rest at lunch or after school? Is there someone who doesn't seem to have a connection with other students, even if he or she seems really outgoing or popular?

If you notice someone who appears isolated or lonely – reach out! Ask him or her about their life; show that you care and want to be a friend. If you yourself are feeling alone, talk to an adult in your life and share what you are experiencing. People care about you and want to help you find support and connection. Feelings of loneliness and isolation can be very painful and sometimes lead to thoughts of self-harm. If anyone shares with you that they have considered hurting themselves, encourage them to seek help. No one needs to be alone with these feelings. If someone tells you that they have recently attempted to end their life or have made a plan to do so, or if you have done so, it is important to tell a trusted adult immediately and/or to

Call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 9-8-8

### Talking about Suicide

Death is one of the most painful realities of this world because it separates members of the human body from one another. Please God, this separation is only temporary. Trusting in the mercy of God, we all hope to be perfectly united together in heaven. Heaven is not just about me and God – it's about the whole human race being saved together.

We always grieve when we lose someone we love, but everything tends to be a bit less certain, a bit more confusing, and a bit sadder when that death is the result of a suicide. We are often left asking questions such as, "How did this happen?", "Was there anything I could have done to prevent it?", "How could they have been in so much pain as to think death was their only escape?" or "What will happen to them now that they are dead?"

When a person is tempted to end his or her life, it is usually because of deep psychological and emotional pain. This pain can blind people from recognizing the important relationships in their lives and from seeing clearly how his or her death will affect the people who love them.



Human beings can build a dam to stop a flooding river. We can compose beautiful symphonies; We can develop medicines that will cure cancer. And yet, for all the power and ingenuity of the human person, not one of us can create life – not even in a lab. We can only participate in its creation. Life is a gift from God. As it is rude to discard something precious that a loved one has given us, even more so is it wrong to throw away or have disdain for the gift of life, which is as unique and unrepeatable as each person alive. In fact, life is so very precious and so very unrepeatable that our faith forbids us from discarding it or throwing it away. "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13, Deut. 5:17). Suicide deeply damages our primary relationship- our relationship with God, our Creator, the One who gives us life and loves us immensely.

Does that mean it is sinful to have suicidal desires? We cannot always control our thoughts or feelings. We can only control what we do with them. Being tempted to self-harm is different from acting on it. When we experience temptations, especially serious ones, we should reach out for help in overcoming them. Sometimes self-harm, such as cutting or eating disorders can become compulsive, and we need experienced assistance to regain our health and freedom.



It is often believed that the Catholic Church teaches that those who take their own lives have committed an unforgivable sin and will go directly to hell. However the victims of these tragedies are usually struggling under the weight of severe anxieties, fears, depression or addictions which cloud their reason and decrease their ability to act in full freedom. God does not hold us fully responsible for actions in which we were not free to choose.

We must also remember that there is no sin that is beyond the reach of God's mercy. In fact, no one is "sent" to hell against their free choice. Rather, a soul ends up in hell as a result of that soul's repeated and final refusal to accept the love and mercy of God. It is not for us to know or judge how a person may have responded to God's merciful love at the moment of death. There is always hope that in that final instant, they repented of their rejection of life, a rejection that so breaks God's heart. And so, while suicide is a very grave sin and we can never presume on God's mercy, neither should we give up hope for the eternal salvation of those whose death is self-inflicted.

But in addition to how it affects our relationship to God, it is also important to recognize how suicide affects our relationships to the people around us. We are all connected. Losing a loved one to suicide, especially a family member, is one of the most painful types of loss. The grief is complicated by guilt (*could I have done something to prevent this?*) and rejection (*why would she choose to leave us like that?*). But the incredible suffering which suicide inflicts on families and communities is only part of the damage, the part we can see. We will never know what effect will be of the loss of one person from the Body of Christ and the loss of the mission He had for us on earth.

John Henry Cardinal Newman, the English convert-saint wrote:

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.

– St. John Henry Newman

Every life is necessary. Every life is important. We are all connected. We are all **made for relationship**.

### Questions for Discussion:

- Why does every life, even those that involve great pain and suffering, matter?
- What do you think might lead someone to thoughts of self-harm or suicide?
- What are some good resources for someone struggling in this way? Who might they reach out to?
- What is something you can do to help prevent suicide among your friends or peers?

### Activity: Seeing the Value of Others

- Look around and write down the names of each person in the room. (*If you do not know someone's name, write a descriptor, such as "the guy closest to the door," and then make a point to ask his/her name later!*)

- Next to their name, list ways that each person's existence has affected you. This could be anything from, "he has been my best friend since third grade" to "she was in my group for the Science project" to "he steals my French fries at lunch every day."
- Imagine how your life would be different if you had never met these people. Next to each person, write how you have been changed (*for better or for worse*) by knowing this person. For example, "I am more joyful when I am around him," "I have learned time-management from working with her," "I have to practice patience when talking with him," or "I want to be more outgoing like she is." Be specific!
- Choose 2-4 people from your list and share with them how they have affected your life (*positively!*) Try to pick at least one person you wouldn't ordinarily talk with.

### Activity: Seeing Myself in Relationship

- Create a web chart with yourself in the center. Draw 8-10 circles branching off the center like spokes on a bicycle wheel.
- In each of the outer circles, write the name of someone who is influential and/or essential for you and with whom you have a relationship. These could be parents, siblings, grandparents, coaches, teammates, teachers, friends, coworkers, etc.
- On the line connecting your circle to theirs, write your relationship to them or how you know them.
- Now try adding 'spokes' to the people in your circle. How are they connected to each other? Who else could you add to the chart to make connections? How complex can you make your web?

