

Lesson 3

PSALM 23

Introduction

Four-year-old Laeka looked at Amy with wide eyes of shock. They had just left Vacation Bible School, and Amy was explaining what she had learned that day. “Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and we’re the sheep!” she announced. “We’re *sheep*?” said Laeka in horror. “I thought we were human beings!” The whole idea of a metaphor was completely lost on him.

We may not like being considered sheep any more than Laeka did. A short study of sheep reveals that it’s not a very complimentary comparison. Sheep are among the most stupid of animals. They are utterly defenseless. If an attacker comes toward them, all they can do is run away. They fall down and can’t get back up. They’ll wander in circles, grazing on brown, inferior pasture until they are led to a better place. Left to their own devices, they are helpless and hopeless.

When we put aside our pride and accept that we’re sheep, we stop relying on ourselves and allow ourselves to be led by the Good Shepherd. We acknowledge our weakness and our need for God. And the Good Shepherd treasures us! He loves us so much that He gave His life to keep us safe.

When David wrote the 23rd Psalm, he wrote from experience. In the years before he was anointed the King of Israel, he had been a shepherd. He knew firsthand both how needy sheep are and what is required of a good shepherd. When predators tried to attack his flock, he showed his love for them by doing whatever was necessary to protect them. When David was convincing King Saul that he had the courage to stand up to Goliath, he said, “Your servant used to tend his father’s sheep, and whenever a lion or bear came to carry off a sheep from the flock, I would go after it and attack it, and rescue the prey from its mouth. If it attacked me, I would seize it by the jaw, strike it, and kill it” (1 Samuel 17:34–35).

Psalm 23, the most familiar of all the psalms, has comforted countless people throughout the centuries. When we repeat the beautiful words, “The Lord is my shepherd,” we are declaring our dependence on God. We’re safe because God promises that He will “fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). God always keeps His promises, and that is the truest source of comfort.

Day One

“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; THERE IS NOTHING I LACK.”

Read Psalm 23.

1. Psalm 23:1 doesn’t say, “The Lord is *a* shepherd,” or “The Lord is *our* shepherd.” It says, “The Lord is *my* shepherd.” What is the significance of this word choice?
2. In John 10:11, Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd.” What insight is gained from the following verses regarding our Good Shepherd?

Luke 15:4–7

John 10:11–15

3. In order to protect his flock, a shepherd would create a sheep pen out of rocks or branches, with a single entrance. At night, he'd lead the sheep into the enclosure and would sleep across the entrance in order to defend them. Knowing this, how do you interpret John 10:7: "So Jesus said again, 'Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep'?"

4. In his song "Gotta Serve Somebody," Bob Dylan sings:

You may be an ambassador to England or France.
You may like to gamble, you might like to dance.
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world.
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls.
But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed.
You're gonna have to serve somebody.
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord,
but you're gonna have to serve somebody.¹

We have a choice in whom we serve. We either serve Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and accept that He's the One in charge, or we serve one who definitely does *not* have our best interests at heart. What are the qualities of our Good Shepherd that make it easier to give Him control of our lives?

¹ Bob Dylan, "Gotta Serve Somebody," *Slow Train Coming* (New York: Columbia Records, 1979), <http://www.songlyrics.com/bob-dylan/gotta-serve-somebody-lyrics/>.

5. It's interesting that David wrote, "The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I lack," when he had experienced so many years of scarcity and difficulty. He had been hunted by King Saul and forced to live as a fugitive, and later was pursued by his own estranged son, Absalom. He had experienced seasons of need. So what did David mean when he wrote, "there is nothing I lack"? Was he suggesting that if you trust in the Lord, you'll never be hungry and will always have what you want? See Philippians 4:19.

Quiet your heart and enjoy His presence. . . . There is nothing you lack if you have Him.

Abhh . . . contentment. That seemingly elusive quality so connected to inner peace. Without it, we are on a fast track to misery. With it, we have abiding joy that can't be taken from us. What do you feel is blocking your personal contentment? Can you name it? So often, we assume contentment comes from the lifting of difficulty, or the receipt of something longed for. But that's not how it works. True contentment comes when we quit acting like discontented sheep, standing at the gate and noticing how green the grass is on the other side. It comes when we look up at our Shepherd and trust that He can see farther than we can, and He is giving us everything we need in this moment. It comes when we accept our life as is, as what His hands have provided. We may not like our circumstances. Our life may be filled with grief, hurt, and pain. When this is the case, our Good Shepherd asks us to come to Him, so He can offer comfort and hope.

Make no mistake, God is deeply concerned about you and what you are longing for. He can see when your motive is pure—when your desire is a good one. But He asks that you trust Him and His timing. The bigger your view of God, the easier this will be. The more you grow in awareness of His majesty, the complexity and faithfulness of His plans, and His limitless love, the more you'll accept and believe that He is a God worthy of your trust.

Take some time to talk to God about what stands in the way of your contentment. Explain to the One who knows and loves you like no other why this matters so much to you. Then place it at His feet. Tell Him that you trust Him with this, your greatest desire. Ask Him to fill your heart with contentment. Ask Him to help you grow so that more and more, you desire what He wants. Every time your heart aches in longing, go back to Him, and give it to Him again. The desire will be safe with Him. He will not forget. He is your Good Shepherd, and He promises to provide all that you need.

Day Two

“IN GREEN PASTURES YOU LET ME GRAZE; TO SAFE WATERS YOU LEAD ME.”

Read Psalm 23:2.

1. Some translations of Psalm 23:2 say that the shepherd “makes me” lie down in green pastures. Wouldn’t you think that lying down in green pastures would be the natural inclination of a sheep? The truth is, sheep will refuse to lie down if they are afraid, hungry, experiencing friction within the herd, or being bothered by pests. No matter how lush and beautiful their surroundings, they’ll rest only when they are free from these things. The only thing that brings them comfort is the presence of the shepherd. In what ways are you like the sheep who find it hard to lie down in green pastures? What steals your inner peace? What keeps you up at night, robbing you of much-needed rest?
2. When the shepherd stands in the midst of the herd of sheep, the sheep instantly are calmer. They know they are defenseless, so having their protector physically close soothes them. How might the following verses offer you comfort when you are afraid? See Psalm 34:8, CCC 336, and Psalm 121.
3. A good shepherd leads his sheep to the best places to graze. Left on their own, sheep will never find good pasture, and will continuously be on their feet, looking for something to satisfy their hunger. Sometimes the shepherd has to remove rocks and roots and stumps in order to create the lush land his sheep need. What

sort of inferior land might you settle for when your soul is hungry? What are the rocks, roots, and stumps that God needs to remove in your heart so that you can freely feed on what He is providing?

The following words of Christian author Peter Kreeft are certainly thought provoking: “We *want* to complexify our lives. We don’t have to, we *want* to. We wanted to be harried and hassled and busy. Unconsciously, we want the very things we complain about. For if we had leisure, we would look at ourselves and listen to our hearts and see the great gaping hole in our hearts and be terrified, because that hole is so big that nothing but God can fill it.”²

4. The friction that sheep experience within a herd certainly lacks the sophistication of human tension, jealousy, and rivalry. Yet the solution is the same. Our eyes can only be in one place at a time. Either they are on Christ the Good Shepherd, or they are on someone or something else. What insight do we gain into this issue from John 10:27?

5. When sheep are agitated by pests, a good shepherd will treat his sheep with insect repellent or dip them in medication to take care of whatever is eating at them. Our Good Shepherd is no different. When He sees circumstances aggravating us, He comes and ministers to us, treating our “bites” and covering us with protection. Which part of the Trinity ministers to us in this way? See CCC 1695.

² Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 168.

Quiet your heart and enjoy His presence. . . . Let Him restore your soul.

After making his sheep lie down in green pastures, the shepherd leads them to still waters. He knows where their thirst will truly be satisfied. Sheep can actually survive for months without drinking from a pool of water if there is dew on the grass where they are feeding. But to drink this dew, they have to get up early.³ There is a replenishing dew available to us each morning. Jesus calls out to us, “Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink” (John 7:37). He promises to restore our souls each and every day. Do you long for this refreshing gift of His presence? Turn the words of this hymn into a prayer: “Dear Lord and Father of mankind, Drop thy still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease; take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace.”

Day Three

“HE GUIDES ME ALONG RIGHT PATHS FOR THE SAKE OF HIS NAME.”

Read Psalm 23:3.

If sheep are not *led* down paths to fresh pasture, they will stay put. They’ll remain in their favorite grazing spots and eat until there is nothing left—even eating the roots of the grass, so that the land ends up ruined. The result? Malnourished sheep and eroded soil. Because of this, it’s very important for a shepherd to keep his flock on the move, making sure that they are following a plan of rotation on fresh pasture. The shepherd has the big picture. He sees all of his land and the advantages and disadvantages of each area. He wisely leads his sheep down a certain path to the right place at the right time. He does this out of love for the sheep, but also for the sake of his name. His reputation as a good shepherd is on the line.

1. We get tempted, just like the sheep, to stay where it’s comfortable. Has God called you to move on to a new, higher pasture? Is He asking you to take a spiritual step of growth and maturity? What is it? How does Hebrews 5:11–6:1 warn us about growing complacent in our walk with Christ?

³ W. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 60.

2. In Mark 8:34, our Good Shepherd described the path we will need to walk if we decide we want to follow Him to spiritual maturity. Put this verse into your own words.

3. To deny yourself and take up your cross is a truly countercultural, radical way to live. You may be called to swim against the tide. In our strongly individualistic society, selfishness runs rampant. We pay lip service to loving one another, but more often than not, we can remain stuck in unhealthy love of self—self-absorption and preoccupation with self (i.e., the me, *me*, ME syndrome). How does Christ ask us to live in John 13:34?

4. When God calls His people to higher pasture, few follow. It's rarely because we don't understand what He is asking. We just don't feel like doing it. Our excuses might sound a lot fancier than that, but the bottom line is, we want to be the ones in charge. We don't want to follow. We want to be the shepherd, not the sheep. Read the following quotes from the saints on obedience. Record any inspiration you gain from their words.

“I often thought my constitution would never endure the work I had to do, [but] the Lord said to me: ‘Daughter, obedience gives strength.’”⁴

—Saint Teresa of Ávila, Doctor of the Church

“The Devil doesn't fear austerity but holy obedience.”⁵ —Saint Francis de Sales

“All that is done by obedience is meritorious. . . . It is obedience, which, by the light of Faith, puts self-will to death, and causes the obedient man to despise his own will and throw himself into the arms of his superior. . . . Placed in the bark of obedience, he passes happily through the stormy sea of this life, in peace of soul and tranquility of heart. Obedience and faith disperse darkness; he is strong

⁴ http://www.whitelilyoftrinity.com/saints_quotes_obedience.html.

⁵ Ibid.

because he has no longer any weakness or fears, for self-will, which is the cause of inordinate fear and weakness, has been destroyed.”⁶

—Saint Catherine of Siena, Doctor of the Church

“A single instant passed under simple obedience is immeasurably more valuable in the sight of God than an entire day spent in the most sublime contemplation.”⁷

—Saint Mary Magdalene de Pazzi

5. The path to follow Christ can seem overwhelming. One might even say it’s impossible. And it would be, if it weren’t for the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The divine power of the Holy Spirit gives us everything we need to live a life of devotion to God (2 Peter 1:3–4). So what would you say to someone who says that she doesn’t feel like the Holy Spirit is making a difference in her life? See CCC 1265 and 1266 and Acts 5:32.

Quiet your heart and enjoy His presence. . . . Let Him guide you on the right paths.

When God leads us down paths that are difficult, we have a choice in terms of how we react. Many people shake their fists at God, demanding an explanation for the divergence from what they desire. This is the easy response. It’s the natural one. Our human nature makes us long to understand. We want to see the meaning behind what we experience. It takes a great deal of self-denial to trust God when we don’t like the path He chooses for us. But when we remain confident in Him and in His love despite our circumstances, we have made the supreme act of love. It consoles the heart of Christ. The greatest gift we can give to Him is an obedient, trustful surrender to His will in our lives. Author Nancy Guthrie calls this act of surrender “giving ourselves over to the goodness of God.” The more we know Jesus as the Good Shepherd, the easier it’ll be to offer Him this gift. Remember that He has the big picture. He’s aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each circumstance and how

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

it'll affect our growth in holiness. He wisely leads each of us down a certain path to the right place at the right time, always for our benefit, and for the sake of His name.

Day Four

“EVEN WHEN I WALK THROUGH A DARK VALLEY, I FEAR NO HARM, FOR YOU ARE AT MY SIDE; YOUR ROD AND YOUR STAFF GIVE ME COURAGE.”

Read Psalm 23:4.

Each summer, shepherds in Israel would drive their sheep up into the hill country. As they slowly wound higher and higher, they would pass through valleys. These valleys were dangerous places where predators waited to attack. There were risks of mudslides, avalanches, chilling storms, and floods. This was a time of intense intimacy with the shepherd, because he was the only one accompanying the sheep on the journey.

1. There is a grammatical change between Psalm 23:1 and 23:4. What is it, and why is it significant?
2. While we wish we could hop from one mountaintop experience to the next, there will always be valleys. Sometimes our valley experiences are similar to those of the sheep, in that the pain or grief is so intense that no person can accompany us there. But even in the most distressing circumstance, we are assured in Psalm 23:4 that we don't need to be afraid. God never said that we wouldn't face danger. But He promised that He would always be with us. This was His message to His people from the beginning of Scripture to the end. Read the following verses, recording your thoughts regarding the difference it makes to face what we fear with our Shepherd by our side.

Deuteronomy 31:6

Isaiah 41:10

Matthew 28:20

Hebrews 13:5–6

3. “I am with you.” That is what God has always said to anyone who is afraid. He promises that no matter what we face, whether the mess we are in is our fault or not, He will never leave us. He will protect us. Statements like that don’t mean very much unless you have a lot of power to back them up. Fortunately for us, God does. Read verse 4 of the psalm. The shepherd’s rod was a club, often with nails in one end of it. It was a weapon. It wasn’t used on the sheep; it was used against predators to protect the sheep. Shepherds could throw the rod with incredible accuracy. What is it about God that can protect us the way a shepherd can protect his sheep with his rod? See Daniel 4:32.
4. Sheep don’t only succumb to dangers from outside the fold. Sometimes they just wander off and end up on the edge of a cliff. They can drink from water that’s fetid and full of disease. And so another very important part of the shepherd’s job is to protect the sheep from themselves. This is where the staff is used. The shepherd’s staff is a long pole with a crook at the top, and it’s used to pull the sheep back to a place of safety, back to the shepherd’s side. What are some examples of “staffs” that God uses to protect us?

Matthew 18:10 and Psalm 91:11

CCC 890 and 896

Quiet your heart and enjoy His presence. . . . He is with us in the valleys.

Time spent in the valley can be some of the most precious moments or seasons we'll experience with the Lord. Why is this? So often the Shepherd's presence is felt more keenly in the valley. This is where we learn about our Savior's all-sufficiency. This is the time when all the things we've learned are put to the test, and we find that if we will trust Him, God is always enough. We don't need to fear whatever comes, because God goes before us. He sees the big picture, and always leads us to the best places. When the places that He has deemed best feel like a big mistake, He stands right beside us, assuring us of His love. Sheep are very timid. The only reason they have confidence to walk through the valley is the shepherd's presence. God offers us that same security.

Day Five

“YOU SET A TABLE BEFORE ME AS MY ENEMIES WATCH; YOU ANOINT MY HEAD WITH OIL; MY CUP OVERFLOWS.”

Read Psalm 23:5.

Shepherds “set a table” for their sheep on the mesas (the high plateaus). These were wonderful grazing lands, but they needed to be prepped by the shepherd before the sheep could go there. The shepherd would go ahead, looking for poisonous plants that needed pulling and keeping a watchful eye for any predators. Even with the shepherd's sharp eye, there was always the possibility that a predator would remain hidden up on the rimrock, waiting for a sheep to roam a little too far from the shepherd. Because an attack would come swiftly, the safest place to be was as close to the shepherd as possible.

1. Our Good Shepherd knows every trick of our enemy, recognizing that “[our] opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus has gone before us, experiencing the attacks and temptations of the devil. He knows what is needed in order for us to remain strong and faithful. Our Good Shepherd sets a table for us in front of our enemies (Psalm 23:5) and places on the table all that we need to be nourished,

strengthened, and protected. It's up to us to eat what He offers. The following verses reveal two of the things that are on the table. What are they?

John 6:54

Jeremiah 15:16

2. When you walk forward to the Eucharistic feast, do you appreciate what it cost Christ to prepare this sacred meal for you? List below some of the sacrifices He made.
3. Shepherds would anoint the heads of the sheep with oil in order to repel insects and soothe wounds. The oil provided both protection and comfort. Anointing with oil has rich meaning in the sacraments. What does it signify in baptism, the anointing of the sick, confirmation, and ordination? See CCC 1294.
4. When a person is anointed with oil in confirmation, he or she is receiving a mark, or seal. Whose seal marks the confirmand? What does being marked with a seal mean? See CCC 1295 and 1296. What does this mean to you?

5. Our Good Shepherd prepares us a table filled with provisions, keeps an eye out for predators, and pours the oil of His Holy Spirit over us, marking us as His own. As long as we keep our perspective on all that He has given us, we'll always agree with the psalmist that our "cup overflows" with blessings from Christ. Make a list of your blessings, both spiritual (Ephesians 1:3–10) and material.

Quiet your heart and enjoy His presence. . . . He pours blessings on us without ceasing.

Ann Voskamp gives beautiful insight into the fruit that comes from a thankful heart in her book One Thousand Gifts:

In the original language, "he gave thanks" reads "eucharisteo." I underline it on the page. . . . The root word of eucharisteo is charis, meaning "grace." Jesus took the bread and saw it as grace and gave thanks. He took the bread and knew it to be a gift and gave thanks. But there is more, and I read it. Eucharisteo, thanksgiving, envelopes the Greek word for grace, charis. But it also holds its derivative, the Greek word chara, meaning "joy." Joy. Ah . . . yes. I might be needing me some of that. That might be what the quest for more is all about—that which Augustine claimed, "Without exception . . . all try their hardest to reach the same goal, that is, joy . . ."

Joy. But where can I seize this holy grail of joy? I look back down to the page. Was this the clue to the quest of all most important? Deep chara joy is found only at the table of the euCHARisteo—the table of thanksgiving. I sat there long . . . wondering . . . is it that simple?

Is the height of my chara joy dependent on the depths of my eucharisteo thanks?

*So then as long as thanks is possible . . . I think this through. **As long as thanks is possible, then joy is always possible. Joy is always possible.** Wherever, meaning—now; wherever, meaning—here. The holy grail of joy is not in some exotic location or some emotional mountain peak experience. The joy wonder could be here! Here, in the messy, piercing ache of now, joy might be—unbelievably—possible!⁸*

⁸ Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 32–3.

Take some time to talk to the Lord about your desire for joy. Ask His forgiveness for any ingratitude or discontent in your heart. Meditate on your blessings and ask the Lord to fill you with a spirit of thanksgiving.

Conclusion

“Only, goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life; I will dwell in the house of the LORD for endless days” (Psalm 23:6).

A sheep who is in the care of an attentive shepherd is in a privileged position. He can rest, because goodness and mercy, embodied in the shepherd, are continuously present.

How many of us confidently say, “Goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life”? It’s not hard to have this attitude when everything is going well. But what about when our loved one suffers wasting disease, or there isn’t enough money to pay the bills, or a child rebels, or a husband is unfaithful, or the demands on us mount and the pressure builds? At those times, we’re tempted to say, “Panic and worry will pursue me all the days of my life.”

Yet the truth is, no matter our circumstances, the love of Christ always pursues us. He *is* goodness and mercy. When we foolishly think that we could survive better on our own, He chases us and calls us home. Jesus said, “What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep’” (Luke 15:4–6).

He longs for us to trust that He is in our tomorrows. We don’t need to fear the future, because He goes before us. Either He will remove the obstacles and shield us from suffering or He will be everlasting arms beneath us, giving us the strength to walk through. And one day, we will dwell in His heavenly home, a place free from sorrow and pain. This is where all our longings will be fulfilled. *Don’t expect earth to feel like heaven. God has never promised that. What He promises is His presence.* Our Good Shepherd assures us that He will stand in our midst, He’ll come after us if we wander, and He’ll go ahead of us to prepare a place of eternal joy and rest. And this is the most abundant life imaginable.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.⁹ —Saint Patrick

My Resolution

In what specific way will I apply what I learned in this lesson?

Examples:

1. I'll begin a journal of my blessings to help me recognize the ways in which God's goodness and mercy pursue me every day.
2. When I go forward to the table my Good Shepherd has prepared for me, I will think about what it cost Him to offer me His body and blood in the Eucharist.
3. I believe God is asking me to go to higher ground with Him. He wants me to take a spiritual step of growth and maturity. I will remember the words of Saint Teresa of Ávila: "Obedience gives strength." This week, I'll take a concrete step to obey God in this area of my life.

My resolution:

⁹ "St. Patrick," GoodReads, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/413139-christ-with-me-christ-before-me-christ-behind-me-christ>.

Catechism Clips

CCC 336 From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. “Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.” Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God.

CCC 890 The mission of the Magisterium is linked to the definitive nature of the covenant established by God with his people in Christ. It is this Magisterium’s task to preserve God’s people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. Thus, the pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abides in the truth that liberates. To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church’s shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals.

CCC 896 The Good Shepherd ought to be the model and “form” of the bishop’s pastoral office. Conscious of his own weaknesses, “the bishop . . . can have compassion for those who are ignorant and erring. He should not refuse to listen to his subjects whose welfare he promotes as of his very own children. . . . The faithful . . . should be closely attached to the bishop as the Church is to Jesus Christ, and as Jesus Christ is to the Father”:

Let all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ follows his Father, and the college of presbyters as the apostles; respect the deacons as you do God’s law. Let no one do anything concerning the Church in separation from the bishop.

CCC 1265 Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte “a new creature,” an adopted son of God, who has become a “partaker of the divine nature,” member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit.

CCC 1266 The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of *justification*:

- enabling them to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him through the theological virtues;
- giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit;
- allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues.

Thus the whole organism of the Christian’s supernatural life has its roots in Baptism.

CCC 1294 Anointing with oil has all these meanings in the sacramental life. The pre-baptismal anointing with the oil of catechumens signifies cleansing and strengthening; the anointing of the sick expresses healing and comfort. The post-baptismal anointing with sacred chrism in Confirmation and ordination is the sign of consecration. By Confirmation Christians, that is, those who are anointed, share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit with which he is filled, so that their lives may give off “the aroma of Christ.”

CCC 1295 By this anointing the confirmand receives the “mark,” the *seal* of the Holy Spirit. A seal is a symbol of a person, a sign of personal authority, or ownership of an object. Hence soldiers were marked with their leader’s seal and slaves with their master’s. A seal authenticates a juridical act or document and occasionally makes it secret.

CCC 1296 Christ himself declared that he was marked with his Father’s seal. Christians are also marked with a seal: “It is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has commissioned us; he has put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” This seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrollment in his service for ever, as well as the promise of divine protection in the great eschatological trial.

CCC 1695 “Justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God,” “sanctified . . . [and] called to be saints,” Christians have become the temple of the Holy Spirit. This “Spirit of the Son” teaches them to pray to the Father and, having become their life, prompts them to act so as to bear “the fruit of the Spirit” by charity in action. Healing the wounds of sin, the Holy Spirit renews us interiorly through a spiritual transformation. He enlightens and strengthens us to live as “children of light” through “all that is good and right and true.”