

Preparation for Retreat: A Day of Reflection on Psalm 1

Scripture teaches: “Blessed is the one who chooses God’s way ... they are like trees growing beside a stream, trees that produce fruit in season and always have leaves. Those people succeed in everything they do.” Psalm 1 beckons us to stand as trees firmly planted. As young people rooted in God’s love, with understanding of who we are and what we stand for, we may then bear fruit in the world in all that we do. There are many places in scripture that remind us that being a faithful people of God produces fruit.

A tree is made up of three parts: roots, trunk, and crown. While trees have various shapes and sizes, all have the same basic structure. Each part represents a piece of our active Christian lives: roots represent prayer, the trunk represents confession, and the crown represents sacrifice.

[During the retreat, use a projector to show the image of a tree: a symbol of who we are, what we stand for, and what we are in the world. You’ll use this image on the wall throughout the retreat.]

Roots (Prayer)

A tree must have strong roots to grow. The way in which we know a tree has strong roots is seen more clearly when its put through a storm. While all the trees look alike when the sun is shining or a gentle rain is falling, once a mighty storm with fierce rain and howling winds pass through, a tree’s essence and strength is revealed. Trees with few roots are blown over while the trees with deep roots are still standing when the storm has passed. So it is for all of us. We won’t know how strong our root system is until the storms of life crash against us. Only then will we discover how strong our faith is. The only way to be ready for the storm is to spend time building a foundation that is both deep and strong for whatever may come.

As young adults, we must strengthen our roots. They need water, fertile soil, and sunlight. Water is the substance that we cannot live without. Fertile soil gives roots the nutrients they needs to grow. Finally, sunlight gives the tree the energy it needs.

Prayer is the movement of the Spirit in our lives. It is the very act of prayer that can ground us, keeps us mindful of the love that God has for us. In prayer the Holy Spirit encourages us, humbles us, and strengthens us, especially in times of trial, tribulation, doubt, fear, and frustration.

- Questions to consider:
 - How is your prayer life?
 - What are you rooted in?
 - Who do you count on in life to nourish and strengthen you?

Trunk (Confession)

The second part of the tree is the trunk. The trunk, or stem, of a tree supports the crown and gives the tree its shape and strength. It is made up of four layers of tissue. These layers have a network of tubes that runs between the roots and the leaves and acts as the central plumbing system for the tree. These tubes carry water and minerals up from the roots to the leaves, and they carry sugar down from the leaves to the branches, trunk, and roots. What you might not know is that the trunk also consists of many types of cells adapted for strength, resistance to injury and decay, transport of liquids, and storage of starch and other materials.

Essentially, the tree trunk makes a tree stand firm. Every day as young adults, you face choices that you need to make. Choices that challenge you to think about what you stand for. In our walk, we are constantly challenged to make decisions and are always called to stand for truth, peace, and love, as Jesus did.

We know that Jesus, when was faced with difficult questions, always stood for truth. He stood beside the poor, the needy, persons with disabilities, those who were sick, and especially those who no one else loved. As Catholics, we are challenged to remember what we stand for each time we are faced with a tough decision and to make decisions based on love, truth, and justice.

Scripture also tells us that we must be like a tree growing beside a stream. We must stand by those who give us life and water and keep us energized. Jesus confessed God's love through his life and through the way in which he conducted his life.

- Questions to consider:
 - What do you stand for?
 - What confession do you make to the world through your life?
 - When have you fallen short in standing for love?
 - What current circumstances in your life are challenging you today?

Crown (sacrifice):

The crown is made up of leaves and branches. These leaves and branches play an important role in filtering dust and other particles from the air. The crown also helps cool the air by providing shade and reduces the impact of raindrops on the soil below.

The leaves are basically the food factories of a tree. They have in them chlorophyll, which facilitates growth and gives leaves their green color. Through a process called photosynthesis, leaves use the sun's energy to convert carbon dioxide (which is a toxic chemical) from the atmosphere and water from the soil into sugar and oxygen. The sugar, which is the tree's food, is either used or stored in the branches, trunk and roots. The oxygen is released into the atmosphere.

We, like the tree crown, are also called to turn what comes to us as toxic chemicals, like envy, jealousy, etc., into something good – like a tree turns carbon dioxide into oxygen. Through the guidance of the Spirit, we are called as Catholics to provide shade to others – comfort to our friends and family and all those around us. We bear the fruits of love, joy, peace, and patience in service to others.

It was through Jesus' sacrifice of love, which was clearly revealed in his actions, that the world came to know the love of God. Sacrifice requires that we, "comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable," meaning that we step out of our comfort zones and enter into the stories and lives of those who suffer. Catholic Social Teaching is the Church's social mission to serve those in need. We are God to those who don't know God. It is through our love, sacrifice, and service that the world is healed and offered shade and nourishment.

The "Two Feet of Social Action in Love" idea points us to become active through "Charitable Works" and "Social Justice."

- Questions to consider:
 - How is God prompting you to become more active in offering shade to those around you?
 - What more can you do to help those less fortunate than yourself?
 - What gifts can you offer to the world?
 - How can you give of yourself to my family and friends?

[Play "[Pep Talk From Kid President](#)" YouTube video]

- Additional questions to consider after video is shown:
 - What gifts have you been given that you can give to the world?
 - What is one thing you can do to make the world more awesome?