



# THIS PRESENT DARKNESS

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## SESSION OVERVIEW

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The whole of man’s history has been the story of dour combat with the powers of evil, stretching, so our Lord tells us, from the very dawn of history until the last day. Finding himself in the midst of the battlefield man has to struggle to do what is right, and it is at great cost to himself, and aided by God’s grace, that he succeeds in achieving his own inner integrity” [CCC 409]. In this session we will discuss how to live without fear in this present darkness and how to contend with the forces of evil.

## SESSION SNAPSHOT

Review the entire lesson plan in advance so you are prepared to lead and discuss comfortably. Gather necessary supplies and review video segments prior to your gathering. Use the time allotments in the session outline below as a guideline, as the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

TIME	SECTION	SECTION OVERVIEW
20 minutes	CONNECT	Lead your group in a discussion activity about advice; then introduce the topic and open in prayer.
50 minutes	DISCUSS	If time permits watch the recommended scenes from the <i>Lord of the Rings</i> . Watch and discuss these video segments: Scene 1: The Dark Angels’ Fall <i>Lord of the Rings: Dark Riders on the Way</i> Scene 2: Abilities and Limits of Demons <i>Lord of the Rings: Weathhertop Battle</i> Scene 3: The Remedy for Temptation and Sin <i>Lord of the Rings: The Palantir</i>
20 minutes	COMMIT	Together review the key points, commit to praying the rosary daily, and close in prayer.

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

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- » Media device to show video segments
- » Access to YouTube or the Lord of the Rings DVDs for movie clips
- » Bibles
- » Participant Sheets
- » Pens or pencils
- » Whiteboard or newsprint and markers (or chalkboard and chalk)

## PREPARE IN ADVANCE

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- » Have snacks ready.
- » Create a welcoming environment.



## LEADER TIPS

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- » We often include possible responses and material from the *Catechism* after the discussion questions to help you facilitate the conversation. Let group members respond first; share the concepts in parentheses only as needed.
- » Need a refresher on angels and demons? Review this article in advance, and consider sharing it with your group. Search Catholicism.org for “The Demonic” or follow this link:  
<http://catholicism.org/ad-rem-no-190.html>



# CONNECT



## ACTIVITY

### ADVISE ME

**SAY:** Let's begin our session by talking about good advice. We can receive good advice through parents, mentors, friends, books, articles, etc. Advice is good when it helps us to become better people. I have 10 lead-in statements. I'll take a few volunteers for each response, and then I'll share a "good advice" quote that relates to the topic.

*Keep the conversation moving along quickly, but make sure to give everyone plenty of chances to share. Let participants jot notes on their Participant Sheets if they'd like.*

#### 1. The best advice I have heard or read about attitude is...

*("I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it...we are in charge of our attitudes." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll)*

#### 2. The best advice I have heard or read about character is...

*("For the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." —1 Samuel 16:7)*

#### 3. The best advice I have heard or read about dating is...

*("The right thing at the wrong time is the wrong thing." —Joshua Harris, I Kissed Dating Goodbye)*

#### 4. The best advice I have or read about prayer is...

*("Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we many thirst for him." —CCC 2560)*

#### 5. The best advice I have heard or read about faith is...

*("Faith is not knowing what the future holds, but knowing who holds the future.")*

#### 6. The best advice I have heard or read about communication with others is...

*("Seek first to understand, then to be understood." —Stephen Covey, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People)*

**7. The best advice I have heard or read about nutrition is...**

*("Every time you eat or drink, you are either feeding disease or fighting it.")*

**8. The best advice I have heard or read about exercise is...**

*("If you don't have time for your health now, you will not have health for your time later.")*

**9. The best advice I have heard or read on dealing with conflict is...**

*("We find comfort among those who agree with us and growth among those who don't.")*

**10. The best advice I have heard about parenting is...**

*("Good parenting is recognizing that you are not raising children but you are raising adults in the making.")*



## INTRODUCTION

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**SAY:** In this session, we will evaluate whose advice is worth listening to. St. Paul writes to the Ephesians: **"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places"** (Ephesians 6:11-12). One thing is for certain, the devil is the father of lies and wants to deceive us with his advice. The Devil will always advise and discourage trusting God's goodness in an effort to pull us away from God and make us vulnerable to his murderous intentions. However, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. He wants to advise us in every moment, and united to Him we have nothing to fear.



## OPENING PRAYER

**SAY:** We are going to open our prayer with a reading from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, then we'll pray the Anima Christi together. You can follow along on your Participant Sheets.



*"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication."*

—Ephesians 6:11-18

### ANIMA CHRISTI

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.  
 Body of Christ, save me.  
 Blood of Christ, inebriate me.  
 Water from the side of Christ, wash me.  
 Passion of Christ, strengthen me.  
 O good Jesus, hear me.  
 Within your wounds, hide me.  
 Let me never be separated from you.  
 From the evil one, protect me.  
 At the hour of my death, call me  
 and bid me to come to you—  
 That with your saints, I may praise you forever and ever.  
 Amen.



# DISCUSS

**SAY:** Let's watch the first scene of this session. Our presenter is Father Josh Waltz, the director of vocations from the diocese of Bismarck, North Dakota.



Watch the first video segment. The video will last about 7½ minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

- » **Jesus gives us a very challenging goal: “You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Since only God is perfect, why would Jesus give us an impossible goal?**

*(The Greek word used for “perfect” is teleios, which means mature, full grown, brought to its full purpose. In this sense, Jesus is exhorting us to become like Him. He is the goal and the way. We are called to grow in the perfection of charity, in holiness, and this is a process that involves our continual effort and God’s continual help, or grace. The Catechism teaches: “**Spiritual progress tends toward ever more intimate union with Christ**” [CCC 2014].)*

- » **Why does the expression “I’m just trying to get into purgatory” completely miss the mark on what Christianity is all about?**

*(Jesus makes the demands of discipleship clear when He says: “**No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God**” [Luke 9:62]. If a ploughman looks back and takes his eyes off the line of the furrow, he will get off track and mess up the job. Jesus uses this image to stress that we are either His disciple or not. It’s an “all in” proposal. If you are shooting for purgatory, it means you are not “all in” or 100% committed to following Jesus. This is not to suggest that we can’t make mistakes—we will, which is why Jesus has given us the Sacrament of Penance to keep our eyes fixed on Him. Jesus also says: “**Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and not do what I tell you?**” [Luke 6:46]. Jesus cannot be the Lord of our lives if we are not giving our best effort to live according to His teaching, given to us through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.)*

- » **What does this statement mean to you: “The temptation to sin is an empty promise.”**

*(Jesus says this about Satan: “**When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar, and the father of lies**” [John 8:44]. When you are tempted to do something you know to be wrong, you are being sold a lie. And the benefit you perceive from giving into temptation is nothing other than an empty promise. For example, a common temptation for college students is to go to “binge drinking” parties. The perceived benefits might be: “I’ll have fun with friends...I’ll meet new friends...I’ll talk to attractive girls/guys...the beer will taste good...the alcohol will make me feel good...we’ll laugh with one another... etc.” In reality, what often happens: “I got sick...I’m embarrassed by the stupid things I did...there were ugly fights...I was impure...I’m hungover...I’m ashamed...what started as fun turned out horrible...etc.” In other words, sin*

can never satisfy the human heart, which is why temptation is an empty promise. Jesus, on the other hand, is **“the way and the truth and the life”** [John 14:6]. His promises are never empty and always true, and the life He gives is always satisfying to the human heart.)

### SAY: Let’s continue with Scene 2.



Watch the video segment. The video will last about 7½ minutes.  
At the end of the segment, discuss.

**SAY:** Father Waltz shares his experience of how demons, when dwelling in someone, will manifest themselves in supernatural ways. For example, the person may growl, have multiple voices come out of them, have extraordinary strength, speak in unknown languages, have obscene and sacrilegious outbursts, have bodily spasms and contortions, and have revulsions to sacred objects like the Crucifix, Holy Water, and the Bible.

#### » How would you respond to someone who says these behaviors are easily explained and treated by modern psychiatric medicine?

*(Father Gabriele Amorth, author of *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, is the chief exorcist of Rome and has performed over 100,000 exorcisms during the course of his ministry. He is an expert in distinguishing demonic possession from mental illness. Those suffering from mental illness cannot do things that are humanly impossible. And yet, it was common for the people who Father Amorth worked with to have super-human strength, speak in a language unknown to them and in a voice that was not theirs, and to have knowledge of personal information of him and the professionals assisting him. Also, when people are delivered from evil spirits, they often acknowledge the ways they gave the spirits access to their bodies and give testimony to being set free from these evil spirits.)*

#### » Father Waltz said that while he was shocked to see manifestations of evil spirits, he had no fear in these encounters. Why do you think he had no fear?

*(Jesus tells us in the Gospels over 20 times to not be afraid. He knows the flesh, the world, and the devil are no match for the Christian who has His life within him. Father Gabriele Amorth shares how the devil and his demons tremble when the name of Jesus and Mary are invoked in prayer. He says that evil spirits are reluctant to talk until they are commanded to in the name of Jesus. The devil has to obey when he is commanded in the name of Jesus. Evil spirits are also tormented by blessed objects, so wearing blessed medals and scapulars is like wearing spiritual armor.)*

#### » What would you say to a friend who thinks the Ouija board is harmless?

*(Just because someone believes the Ouija board is harmless doesn’t make it so. They can choose not to believe in evil spirits, but that doesn’t make them less real, and evil spirits will take advantage of any access you give them—whether you believe in them or not. In fact, investigations have discovered a direct link with forms of divination, like the Ouija board, to the most serious cases of demonic activity in people. Divination is any practice aimed at communicating with spirits. The Catechism teaches: **“All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices***

*falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone"* [CCC 2116].)

» **Father Waltz said that someone who has dabbled in divination needs to get to confession immediately. What difference do you think confession would make in this situation?**

*(Even if someone was not aware that what they were doing was sinful, it is still important to get to confession. You can think of evil spirits like a virus. They are opportunistic and look to infect their host, grow, and take over the body. Like a virus, they can also be latent—present without any noticeable symptoms. Only Jesus can eradicate these viruses from the body. In the Sacrament of Penance, we are forgiven and divine life is restored within us. The sacrament of reconciliation is even more powerful than the Rite of Exorcism, because exorcism is not a Sacrament.)*

**SAY: Let's continue with Scene 3.**



Watch the video segment, which will last about 7 minutes.  
At the end of the segment, discuss.

» **St. Josemaria Escriva wrote: "To be happy, what you need is not an easy life but a heart which is in love." Why do you think joy cannot be found in a life free from difficulty?**

*(Joy is discovered in becoming like Jesus, and we desire to become more like Jesus the more we love Him. It is not easy to become like Jesus because it means dying to our preferences in order to serve God and others. Jesus gives us grace to grow if we choose to cooperate with His grace. For example, a great marriage is built through much effort. The couple that perseveres grows in virtue and love for one another. As a result, they are more blessed in their relationship with one another and their relationships with their children. Had they not persevered and worked hard to build a strong marriage and become strong parents, they would have never experienced the joy that selfless marriage and family life gives. Resisting temptation, praying daily, frequenting the sacraments, and serving others is hard work. But it is the path to holiness, which is the path to indescribable joy!)*

» **C.S. Lewis wrote in Mere Christianity: "How monotonously alike all the great tyrants and conquerors have been; how gloriously different are the saints." How would you interpret this quote?**

*(C.S. Lewis is speaking of great tyrants and conquerors as "natural" men. In this sense, they are not great at all, are not unique, and are quite boring. It is "natural" men transformed by the supernatural who are the most unique, fascinating, and glorious. This is why the stories of the saints inspire us so much. They are the most courageous people to have ever lived. They prove that the more we allow Jesus to take over our lives, the more truly ourselves we become. It is for this reason that evil is actually monotonous and boring and the attraction to evil is the devil's deception.)*

- » **A college-age atheist argued with Catholic missionaries on campus. He made the point that if there is a God who is all-loving and all-powerful, then He would not allow evil to exist; but evil does exist, so there is no God. How would you respond if you were one of the missionaries?**

*(Evil is not a thing in itself but is actually the absence of good. God is all-good and all-loving and therefore cannot create evil. Even Satan and the demons were good angels before they chose to be separated from their loving Creator. Therefore, evil is not created but is the failure to choose what is good. In the same way, God did not create hell. Hell is the personal choice to be separated from God forever. Father Gabriele Amorth asked the devil during an exorcism if he created hell. The devil responded: "We all cooperated." So, the missionary could pose a question back to the atheist: "Would an all-good and loving God create you without the freedom to determine your own life?" There is evil in the world because there is free will.)*

- » **St. Pio referred to his rosary as his weapon. Why is this an appropriate description for the rosary?**

*(Padre Pio understood spiritual warfare. He wrote about his numerous battles with the devil, who had a particular hatred for him because he freed many souls from the devil's grip. Padre Pio was known to say the rosary numerous times throughout the day. He said: "The rosary is the weapon given us by Mary to use against the tricks of the infernal enemy" and "Satan always tries to destroy the rosary, but he will never succeed." Many saints have said that praying the rosary devoutly, interceding for others, is an exceptionally powerful method of prayer.)*

- » **St. Paul speaks of the armor of God in Ephesians 6:11-18. How would you describe each piece of this armor in your own words?**

#### **Belt of truth**

*(The teaching of Christ is passed on to us through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition under the guidance of the Magisterium of the Church. When we form ourselves in this truth, we will be protected from the deceptions of the devil.)*

#### **Breastplate of righteousness**

*(We are righteous when we are in the state of grace. We receive grace through the sacraments of the Church. We became righteous in Christ through our baptism.)*

#### **Shod feet with the gospel of peace**

*(We are called to engage in this conflict, marching into Satan's territory and sharing the gospel of salvation to others so that they may be set free.)*

#### **Shield of faith**

*(Faith is to entrust one's life to Jesus in this great conflict. He is faithful and we only need to keep our eyes fixed on Him.)*

### Helmet of salvation

*(Our salvation is found in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. Satan will try and clobber us with thoughts that are contrary to this truth—we are not worthy, we are unlovable, we can save ourselves, etc. The moral assurance of salvation protects us from these attacks.)*

### Sword of the Spirit

*(All other pieces of the armor of God are defensive in nature. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit and is an offensive weapon. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert, the Word of God was always his overpowering response to Satan. When we pray with Scripture, memorize Scripture, and study Scripture, God's Word penetrates our hearts and minds and will come to mind when in confrontation with the forces of evil.)*



## COMMIT



## ACTIVITY

### TAKE-AWAY

**SAY:** I am going to go around the circle, starting with the person on my right, and I'd like each of us to share something we remember that this person said tonight.

*Take a minute and go around the group, asking everyone to share briefly. Then continue.*

Now I want to go around the circle again, this time starting with the person on my left, and I'd like each of us to share one "take-away" from tonight. In other words, share something that resonates in your heart as a truth to live by.

*Give everyone time to share and then continue.*

**SAY:** When something resonates with our hearts, we should be mindful to take that to prayer, as that is generally how the Holy Spirit works. So I encourage you to take whatever touched your heart in this session into your prayer this week. In addition to prayer, how are your spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S. coming along?

*Encourage your group to share how they have grown spiritually since your last meeting by practicing spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S. Ask them if there is any way you can help them in their commitment to developing spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S. You can find the H.A.B.I.T.S. in the Leader Guide for Follow Me, Session 5: The Cost. After everyone has shared, follow up on last week's commitments before discussing the new commitment.*

**SAY:** This week the challenge is to never be without your weapon. Keep your rosary on you at all times and pray it throughout the day. Maybe you are only able to pray a decade at a time throughout the day, but do so contemplating the mystery and offering the decade up for someone and the poor souls in purgatory.

Let's end this study with a hopeful reminder: it can be easy to fixate and become fascinated with the "creepy" aspects of demonic influence, but that can spoil the triumphant conclusion that Jesus Christ **always** wins. Satan tries desperately to manipulate the truth and make us believe that he has more power than he really does. Instead of letting his power tempt or scare us, let's fix our eyes on Christ and speak His words, especially the Lord's Prayer that He gave us, when we feel the darkness of the devil.



## CLOSING PRAYER

**SAY:** As Father Waltz mentioned in his talk, there is great power in the name of Jesus. Let's close our time together praying the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus. Your response will be: "Have mercy on us."

### PRAY:

V. Lord, have mercy on us.

R. Christ, have mercy on us.

V. Lord, have mercy on us. Jesus, hear us.

R. Jesus, graciously hear us.

God the Father of Heaven, R. Have mercy on us.

God the Son, Redeemer of the world, [etc.]

God the Holy Spirit,

Holy Trinity, one God,

Jesus, Son of the living God,

Jesus, splendor of the Father,

Jesus, brightness of eternal light.

Jesus, King of glory.

Jesus, sun of justice.

Jesus, Son of the Virgin Mary.

Jesus, most amiable.

Jesus, most admirable.

Jesus, the mighty God.

Jesus, Father of the world to come.

Jesus, angel of great counsel.

Jesus, most powerful.

Jesus, most patient.

Jesus, most obedient.  
 Jesus, meek and humble of heart.  
 Jesus, lover of chastity.  
 Jesus, lover of us.  
 Jesus, God of peace.  
 Jesus, author of life.  
 Jesus, example of virtues.  
 Jesus, zealous lover of souls.  
 Jesus, our God.  
 Jesus, our refuge.  
 Jesus, father of the poor.  
 Jesus, treasure of the faithful.  
 Jesus, good Shepherd.  
 Jesus, true light.  
 Jesus, eternal wisdom.  
 Jesus, infinite goodness.  
 Jesus, our way and our life.  
 Jesus, joy of Angels.  
 Jesus, King of the Patriarchs.  
 Jesus, Master of the Apostles.  
 Jesus, teacher of the Evangelists.  
 Jesus, strength of Martyrs.  
 Jesus, light of Confessors.  
 Jesus, purity of Virgins.  
 Jesus, crown of Saints.

V. Be merciful, *R. spare us, O Jesus.*  
 V. Be merciful, *R. graciously hear us, O Jesus.*  
 V. From all evil, *R. deliver us, O Jesus.*  
 From all sin, deliver us, O Jesus.  
 From Your wrath, [etc.]

From the snares of the devil.  
 From the spirit of fornication.  
 From everlasting death.  
 From the neglect of Your inspirations.  
 By the mystery of Your holy Incarnation.  
 By Your Nativity.  
 By Your Infancy.  
 By Your most divine Life.  
 By Your labors.  
 By Your agony and passion.  
 By Your cross and dereliction.  
 By Your sufferings.  
 By Your death and burial.  
 By Your Resurrection.  
 By Your Ascension.  
 By Your institution of the most Holy Eucharist.  
 By Your joys.  
 By Your glory.

V. Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world,  
*R. spare us, O Jesus.*

V. Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world,  
*R. graciously hear us, O Jesus.*

V. Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world,  
*R. have mercy on us, O Jesus.*

V. Jesus, hear us.  
*R. Jesus, graciously hear us.*

Let us pray.

O Lord Jesus Christ, You have said, "Ask and you shall receive, seek, and you shall find, knock, and it shall be opened to you." Grant, we beg of You, to us who ask it, the gift of Your most divine love, that we may ever love You with our whole heart, in word and deed, and never cease praising You.

Give us, O Lord, as much a lasting fear as a lasting love of Your Holy Name, for You, who live and are King for ever and ever, never fail to govern those whom You have solidly established in Your love.

*R. Amen.*