



Hearing  
**God's  
call**

AN AUDIO INTRODUCTION TO THE CATHOLIC FAITH

**COMPANION GUIDE**

## Companion Guide to

# *Hearing God's Call: An Audio Introduction to the Catholic Faith*



This resource was originally published in 2011 as a CD series. In 2022 it was made available on a number of podcast platforms. In 2023 it was added to the National Centre for Evangelisation's (NCE) online resource library, *Evangelise Plus*. The NCE is an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The Catholic Enquiry Centre is a work of the NCE.

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*We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.*

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*The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference acknowledges with sorrow the experiences of adults subjected to childhood abuse within the Church. We recognise and acknowledge the harm caused by the abuse and the ongoing suffering this has caused in people's lives. We deeply regret the failure of the Catholic Church to protect and believe them, and to respond with justice. We also recognise the harm this has caused to their families, to the Catholic community, and in Australian society. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference is committed to promoting and fostering a culture of care and safety, with compassion for all who come forward with reports of abuse.*

# How to use this resource

Welcome to this 30-session program of recordings, *Hearing God's Call: An Audio Introduction to the Catholic Faith*. A broad range of topics are explored in this program, which begins with stories of saints and heroes from the Bible and the history of the Church, moves then to examine some of the core beliefs of the Catholic Church, before exploring the topics of prayer and the Church in the modern world.

Each session comprises an exploration of the topic, often noting relevant texts from the Bible, questions for reflection, prayer and a suggestion for a movie that might assist with delving a little deeper into the topic.

The recordings are designed to be listened to from beginning to end, at your own pace, with each 10-minute session building on the sessions that have come before. As you listen to the audio recordings you are invited to enter into a deep, rich and fulfilling relationship with God through the Catholic faith. You might find it helpful to use a journal to write down your thoughts and respond to the questions that are offered as part of each session.

We strongly recommend individuals find someone to accompany them on their faith journey. Your local Catholic church/parish is a good place to seek out a suitable person to journey with you.

Also available is the *Hearing God's Call Companion Guide Summary*, a condensed version of this document. Both documents will be helpful for the individual navigating the material in their own time, as well as those leading adult formation or the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process. The audio series could also be used as a tool for discussion and accompaniment for those working in pastoral ministry, such as youth groups or small group coordination.

Another helpful resource for those coming to know Jesus through the Catholic Church is the [Becoming Catholic](http://www.becoming.catholic.au) website ([www.becoming.catholic.au](http://www.becoming.catholic.au)). On this website you will be able to access free resources about the Catholic faith (only available for Australian addresses), as well as links to more in-depth articles to help you grow in faith and understanding.

Please note the 2011 audio production occasionally refers to the Catholic Enquiry Centre (CEC) and its former location in Sydney, Australia. Any correspondence, including questions about becoming a Catholic, should now be sent via the following options:

Complete this form online: [www.catholic.au/s/contactus](http://www.catholic.au/s/contactus)

Email: [info@catholicenquiry.com](mailto:info@catholicenquiry.com).

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# Session 1

## Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to session 1 of this 30-session program of recordings, *Hearing God's Call: An Audio Introduction to the Catholic Faith*. The series is produced by the Catholic Enquiry Centre, an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. As you listen to this series of audio recordings you are invited to enter into a deep, rich and fulfilling relationship with God through the Catholic faith.

These recordings are designed to be listened to from beginning to end, at your own pace, with each 10-minute session building on the sessions that have come before. There is a broad range of topics explored in this program, which begins with stories of saints and heroes from the Bible and the history of the Church, moves then to examine some of the core beliefs of the Catholic Church, before exploring the topic of prayer.

The program concludes with a session on the topic of Catholic social thought and offers some suggestions as to what resources you might want to get to assist you in your search for God who is calling you.

## Teaching (based on the podcast)

All of us want to be loved and to love others. God wants us to feel loved by him and he invites us to love him. We know that sometimes we do not feel very loved. We also know of other people who have been treated badly and perhaps the actions of others have brought about suffering in our life.

Some people report that they experience God calling them in a very special way. These people talk about a feeling of being chosen by God and of being invited into a much larger world. For other people the call from God is much more gradual and perhaps even stop-and-start. It may be like an uneasy feeling which is followed by a sense that God is calling them.

The important thing to remember is that there is no wrong way to be called by God. The way you have been called is the way God has called you. It is the right way for you. Perhaps listening to this series of audio presentations will form part of God's call to you. A part of each session is the title and a brief summary of a film. The purpose of the suggested film is to provide an opportunity, for those who would like, to enrich their understanding of a particular topic or indeed each topic.

The films have been selected with a view both to their usefulness in helping to fill out a topic area and their ease of availability. Films tell stories that engage our minds and our feelings and can provide an opportunity to discuss the big issues in life, while at the same time entertaining us. The films have been selected with an adult audience in mind.

A few points to note:

1. It is hoped that the themes covered in the films and the questions they raise in the mind of the viewer may assist you in your journey of faith.
2. *Hearing God's Call* stands alone as a complete series and is not dependent upon viewing films.
3. The fact that films have been recommended as a follow-up resource should not be taken as an indication of approval of particular scenes or themes addressed in the films.

Part of each session is a series of questions through which you will be invited to reflect upon the content of the session and what it might mean for you. You are encouraged to write or draw your responses to the questions and collect them together in an orderly manner. As is the case with the films, the questions are provided as a resource for those who choose to take the time to reflect on the contents, but *Hearing God's Call* can be simply listened to as a source of useful information presented in an engaging way.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

As you begin this program spend a little time reflecting on what you hope to gain from listening to this series of audio presentations. You may want to make a list on a sheet of paper or on the first page of a book that may serve as a companion journal for the program.

### Question 2

The name of this program is *Hearing God's Call: An Audio Introduction to the Catholic Faith*. Think about the set of circumstances that has led you to begin listening to this program and write them down. Looking at what you have written, can you see any instances of God working through the circumstance or people involved?

### Question 3

The third question in each of the sessions is an invitation to take your reflections on the topic covered in the session to prayer. For this session you might want to ask God to help you to be open to hearing and understanding the content of the sessions that are to follow.

## Movie

A film that might help to introduce *Hearing God's Call* is ***The Blind Side***. Made in 2009, this film was directed by John Lee Hancock and stars Quinton Aaron.

*The Blind Side* is a football story about a young black man on the streets, who is adopted by a family who bond well with him. They are a church-going Christian family, strong but not overbearing in their faith, with a sense of values and justice which enables the young man to develop his gifts and become a champion.

In listening to Leigh Anne Tuohy (Sandra Bullock won an Oscar for this performance), we hear an affirmation of life, of belief, of love, based on the Gospel values. The film shows the possibilities for a committed life.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a reading from the first letter of John, chapter 1, verses 1-3.

Something which has existed since the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have watched and touched with our own hands, the Word of life – this is our theme.

That life was made visible; we saw it and are giving our testimony, declaring to you the eternal life, which was present to the Father and has been revealed to us.

We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard, so that you too may share our life. Our life is shared with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.



## Session 2

### Hearing God's Call: Models of Faith in the Old Testament

Each of us is called by God to fulfill a particular mission or vocation. Our task is to respond to the call. In this session we explore stories of call as recorded in the Old Testament, the first part of the Bible. We begin with the call of Abram, later named by God, Abraham.

#### Teaching (based on the podcast)

In chapter 12 of the Book of Genesis, we find the story of Abram being called by God to move out from his homeland to go into the unknown. God promises Abram fulfillment, but Abram must take a risk. God calls Abram by name. Abram responds to God's call, leaving the place where he feels at home, to travel to a land he does not know.

As we read in the Bible in verses 1-2 of chapter 12 of Genesis:

Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.'

The next example of a call in the Bible is the call of Moses in chapter 3 of Exodus.

In this story God calls Moses by name from the middle of a burning bush. Moses responds by asking God's name. God answers 'I AM WHO I AM'. In Exodus, chapter 3 we read:

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.

Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And Moses said, 'Here I am.' Then God said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.'

He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.



But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'

God calls Moses by name and Moses responds by seeking to know more about the one who is calling him.

About 200 years after the account of Moses and the burning bush we have the story of the call of Samuel. We can find the story in the first Book of Samuel, chapter 3, verses 1-21. At the time Samuel lived in the shrine of the Ark of the Covenant. In summary, the story is as follows: while asleep, Samuel hears a voice calling his name. Unsure of whose voice it is, Samuel asks his friend Eli, the priest if it was *he* who had been calling. This happens three times. Finally, Eli tells Samuel he thinks that the voice is from God. Eli then advises Samuel to respond to the voice with the following words: 'Speak, LORD for your servant is listening'.

In this story Samuel is called by name and responds by inviting God to speak to him more. In asking God to speak to him more, Samuel was praying. Prayer is an important part of our response to God's call.

### **David and the Psalms – prayers of praise and prayers of repentance**

A person of great prayer in the Bible is King David. He was highly regarded by the Hebrew people. Such was his reputation that he was credited as being the author of all the psalms. In fact, while he was a poet and wrote a number of them, the Book of Psalms represents a collection that was gathered over several centuries. We find in the psalms two types of prayer as response to God's call: prayers of praise and prayers of repentance.

#### **Prayers of praise**

The first four verses of Psalm 92, 'A Song for the Sabbath Day', give us a taste of a joyful response to God. As the writer delights in God's presence, praising God in words, music and dance:

It is good to give thanks to the LORD  
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;  
to declare your steadfast love in the morning  
and your faithfulness by night,  
to the music of the lute and the harp,  
to the melody of the lyre.

For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work;  
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

## Prayers of repentance

While David was a wise king who brought peace and prosperity to his people, he was also a sinful man. On one occasion, David was overtaken by lust. Giving in to temptation, he turned away from God and sought the wife of another man. Such was David's desire to be with the woman that he arranged for her husband to be killed in battle. Sometime later, the prophet Nathan challenged David about his actions. Responding to God's call through Nathan, David came to his senses, acknowledged he had sinned and sought forgiveness from God. The experience of sin and repentance forms the source of the psalms of lament and sorrow. In Psalm 69, we find a call from the depths of the heart of one who knows that he has sinned:

I sink in deep mire,  
where there is no foothold;  
I have come into deep waters,  
and the flood sweeps over me.  
I am weary with my crying;  
my throat is parched.  
My eyes grow dim  
with waiting for my God.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

As you reflect on the story of Abram, later named Abraham, called away from his home, what stands out for you with regard to an experience you have had of being away from home?

### Question 2

In what ways has the experience of being away from home challenged you to change for the better?

### Question 3

As you take this session to prayer is there an intention that you would like to place before God?

## Movie

A film that might help to explore Old Testament stories of call or invitation is *Abraham*. Made in 1993, this film was directed by Joseph Sargent and stars Richard Harris. Old Testament history begins with the call of Abraham. The Bible offers words. The film offers story and images. Abraham is seen as a patriarch who experiences something of the presence of God. This he

interprets as a call to faith, as well as a call to move to a 'promised land' with his whole clan. He offers a pledge ritual with a sacrifice, a covenant to commit himself to the God who has called him. In seeing Richard Harris as Abraham, the patriarch and the events in his faith journey come to life for us.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a prayer of praise to God as Father, Son and Spirit.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.

Amen.



## Session 3

### The Prophets – Faithful Witnesses to God

In this session, we explore stories of call and response as proclaimed by the prophets in the Old Testament. The prophets provide us with powerful examples of call and response in prayer and action. Each prophet writes of his experience in his own way. From the many great prophets, we briefly examine four: Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Micah.

#### Teaching (based on the podcast)

The title “prophet” can evoke the image of a man or a woman who goes into some form of trance and has a vision of a future event. There were groups of people in the ancient Middle East and beyond who acted in such ways and these people were called prophets.

The prophets of Israel, however, were not like this, even though they too were called prophets. They were men who were called to proclaim and interpret the word of God, and to encourage the people back to true worship. Their sometimes dire warnings were the fruit of:

- keen observation of human behaviour,
- a thorough knowledge of the law of God, and
- an awareness of what had happened to other peoples who had not kept the laws of God in the past.

The particular call or vocation from God that the prophets had received was to proclaim the truth and highlight hypocrisy.

#### Amos

Amos was called to be a prophet of God whilst tending sheep at Tekoa in the land of Judah. As the story is told, Amos is utterly convinced that God has spoken to him and asked him to speak to others. The prayers and pronouncements of Amos have a no-nonsense quality. In the following passage from Amos, chapter 5, verses 23-24 we hear an example of his proclamation against empty ritual:

Take away from me the noise of your songs  
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

## Hosea

The prophet Hosea is portrayed searching for his unfaithful wife Gomer. Hosea provides a model of God searching for the people of Israel and his prayers have a quality of tenderness and forgiveness, as follows from Hosea, chapter 14, verses 4-5:

I will heal their disloyalty;  
I will love them freely,  
for my anger has turned from them.  
I will be like the dew to Israel  
he shall blossom like the lily,  
he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon.

## Jeremiah

Jeremiah was a person who was somewhat afraid of what God's call might mean for him as he did not think he was up to the task that God was asking of him. In Jeremiah, chapter 1, verses 6-8 we find the following:

'Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.'  
But the LORD said to me,  
'Do not say, "I am only a boy"  
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,  
and you shall speak whatever I command you.  
Do not be afraid of them,  
for I am with you to deliver you,  
says the LORD'.

In another passage, Jeremiah, chapter 12, verse 1, we find the passionate prophet expressing anger and frustration at God's apparent inaction in the face of injustice. Jeremiah is confused and angry. He asks God why it is he who gets thrown down wells while the sinners prosper, why it is he who is regarded as nothing in the community, when it is he who is supposed to be the good one. This is the response of one who feels a close personal relationship with God, one who feels he can argue with God:

You will be in the right, O LORD  
when I lay charges against you;  
but let me put my case to you.  
Why does the way of the guilty prosper?  
Why do all who are treacherous thrive?

## Micah

The prophet Micah lived at the same time as Hosea and, like Amos, spoke in a no-nonsense manner. The following lines from Micah, chapter 6, verse 8, sum up a pattern of living as an appropriate response to the call of God:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

As you reflect on the word of the prophets, are you left with any questions about being a faithful witness to God?

### Question 2

What is your experience of being challenged to be a faithful witness to God?

### Question 3

As you take this session to prayer, what intentions have come to mind for you about being a faithful witness to God?

## Movie

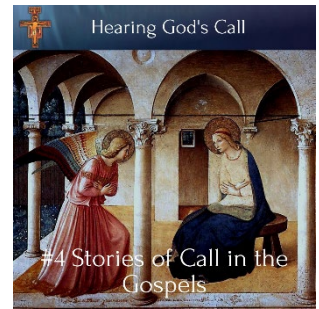
A film that might help to explore the life of the prophets is *Jeremiah*. Made in 1998, this film is directed by Harry Winer and stars Patrick Dempsey. Prophets experience the call in their own lives and feel commissioned by God to urge people to faith and renewal of commitment. Prophets are not usually listened to and are even persecuted. The movie *Jeremiah* is a combination of fact and imagination.

While the scriptures tell us of Jeremiah being called to speak on behalf of God when young, the film fleshes out his story so that the prophet is not just a voice in the scripture readings but can be seen to be an energetic preacher who has to put up with a great deal of criticism and rejection.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with the **Benedictus**, the prayer proclaimed by Zechariah, the father of the New Testament prophet John the Baptist when his son is named:

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel  
He has visited his people and redeemed them.  
He has raised up for us a mighty saviour  
in the house of David his servant,  
as he promised by the lips of holy men,  
those who were his prophets from of old.  
A saviour who would free us from our foes,  
from the hands of all who hate us.  
So his love for our fathers is fulfilled  
and his holy covenant remembered.  
He swore to Abraham our father to grant us that  
free from fear, and saved from the hands of our foes,  
we might serve him in holiness and justice  
all the days of our life in his presence.  
As for you, little child,  
you shall be called a prophet of God, the Most High.  
You shall go ahead of the Lord,  
to prepare his ways before him.  
To make known to his people their salvation  
through forgiveness of all their sins,  
the loving-kindness of the heart of our God  
who visits us like the dawn from on high.  
He will give light to those in darkness,  
those who dwell in the shadow of death,  
and guide us into the way of peace.



## Session 4

### Stories of Call in the Gospels

This session explores stories of call as recorded in the Gospels, which are found in the second part of the Bible; the New Testament. The specific stories examined are the call from God to Mary through an angel, the call to Joseph in a dream and the call from Jesus to the first disciples.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

#### The Call of Mary

The “annunciation” or announcement to Mary is the most famous account of a call in the whole of the Bible. The story begins with an account of the angel Gabriel addressing the young virgin named Mary who was engaged to Joseph. The angel Gabriel says the following words, “Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you”.

As a virgin, under ordinary circumstances, Mary could not have conceived a child. The angel tells Mary that, if she accepts God’s invitation, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”. It is to be through Mary that God will become one with humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. Mary’s reply was one of total acceptance: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

#### The Call of Joseph

The role of Mary in the birth of Jesus is of course vital; there can be no baby without a mother. While less obvious, the role of Joseph in the extraordinary set of events that led to the birth of Jesus was also vital. In the culture of Palestine 2000 years ago a woman had no identity of her own. At that time in that culture a woman gained her identity by her relationship to a man either as a mother, daughter or wife. In a culture in which male honour was a very strong factor, widows and women who fell pregnant outside of marriage were on the very margins of society. Given that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, his decision to marry the seemingly shameful Mary was courageous. In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1, verses 18-25, we read that it was through a dream that Joseph was called to take Mary as his wife and name her son and care for him as if his own.

“This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy



Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet:

'Look! the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'.' When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home; he had not had intercourse with her when she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus."

## **Jesus Calls the First Disciples**

In the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, we find the story of the call of the first disciples through a sign. Jesus calls the three fishermen: Simon, also known as Peter, James and John. Even though the fishermen had caught nothing throughout the night, Jesus instructs them to go out a little way into the lake and lower their nets. They caught so many fish that the nets began to break. Simon Peter's response to this sign from God was in both action and words: he fell down at the knees of Jesus saying:

"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man"... Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him".

A little later, Jesus saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' In response, Levi, who was also called Matthew, left everything and followed Jesus.

## **God's Call to You**

Just as the early followers of Christ – Mary, Joseph, Peter, James, John and Matthew – were called in their own way and responded positively to their call, God's personal call to you is an invitation for you to respond by saying 'Yes'.

## **Questions**

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### **Question 1**

As you reflect on the call stories of Mary and Joseph, what elements in the stories surprised you?

## Question 2

What episodes from any of the call stories are you drawn towards and why?

## Question 3

As you bring this session to prayer think about what God's call to you is and what your response is.

## Movie

A film that might help to explore the stories of call in the Gospels is *The Nativity Story*. Made in 2006, this film was directed by Catherine Hardwicke and stars Keisha Castle-Hughes.

*The Nativity Story* is one of the best films to appreciate the call of Mary (the annunciation of Jesus' birth by the angel Gabriel) and one of the few films to show Joseph as a young, hard-working man in Nazareth who has to cope with the mystery of his wife's unexpected pregnancy. The actors are young and credible. We see the daily routines of life in Nazareth, reminding us that ordinary life can be the setting for a special call by God. The film shows Joseph's doubts as well as his call. The long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem reminds us that while we can focus on the call, we have to face living the consequences of the call in hard times as well as good.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with the Song of Mary: the Magnificat, which Luke places on the lips of the pregnant Mary during her visit to Elizabeth, who was also pregnant, carrying John the Baptist:

My soul glorifies the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour.  
He looks on his servant in her lowliness;  
henceforth all ages will call me blessed.  
'The Almighty works marvels for me.  
Holy his name.  
His mercy is from age to age,  
on those who fear him.  
He puts forth his arm in strength  
and scatters the proud-hearted.  
He casts the mighty from their thrones  
and raises the lowly.  
He fills the starving with good things,  
sends the rich away empty.  
He protects Israel, his servant

remembering his mercy,  
the mercy promised to our fathers,  
to Abraham and his sons forever.



## Session 5

### Peter and Paul, Apostles of Jesus Christ

The Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ. The apostles Peter and Paul provided the foundation and vision for the Church to consolidate and grow through the exercise of pastoral care and authority and the clear articulation of teaching. The Church celebrates a combined feast day for Saints Peter and Paul on 29 June each year.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

Peter is portrayed in the Bible as a poor, uneducated fisherman from the rural region of Galilee. Paul, also known by his Jewish name Saul, was from the city of Tarsus, located in what is now southern Turkey. Paul was well-educated in the Roman system and trained in the rigorous code of the Jewish group the pharisees. Paul had skills as both a lawyer and as a maker of tents.

Both Peter and Paul were personally called by Christ to follow him but in totally different ways. Peter knew Jesus as he walked the roads of Palestine and was present at the Last Supper. Peter had experienced the grief of losing his close friend Jesus through an unjust crucifixion. Paul's knowledge of Christ began with an extraordinary encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus.

From the Bible we get a picture of Peter as impulsive and rash, as someone who struggled to understand and believe in the meaning of Christ all through the time he shared with Jesus. Peter's struggle to believe is perhaps best illustrated by his denial that he knew Jesus when people questioned him after Jesus had been arrested. In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 26, verses 69-75, we find the following:

Meanwhile Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant girl came up to him saying, 'You, too, were with Jesus the Galilean.' But he denied it in front of them all. 'I do not know what you are talking about,' he said. When he went out to the gateway another servant-girl saw him and said to the people there, 'This man was with Jesus the Nazarene.' And again, with an oath, he denied it, 'I do not know the man.'

A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'You are certainly one of them too! Why, your accent gives you away.' Then he started cursing and swearing, 'I do not know the man.' And at once the cock crowed, and Peter remembered what Jesus had

said, 'Before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Yet it is the same Peter who preached the first sermon of the Church at Pentecost. Standing up as leader of the apostles and addressing the Jerusalem crowd in a loud voice, he said 'Men of Judaea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, make no mistake about this, but listen carefully to what I say'. See the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2, verses 15-36.

We first meet Saul, also known as Paul, in the Acts of the Apostles where he minds the coats of those who are stoning the young man Stephen to death. Stephen's only crime had been preaching about Jesus of Nazareth. See the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 7, verse 55, to chapter 8, verse 3. As a strict and zealous Jew, Saul was on a mission to squash this new movement that was proclaiming Christ as Lord.

The conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus is perhaps the most dramatic account of a call from God in the whole of the Bible. As told in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 9, verses 3-9, Saul was approaching Damascus, when:

... suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' Saul asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.'

The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

In time, Saul began to use the name Paul more often. It is as Paul that he is known as the great preacher of the Gospel to the people of the Roman world beyond the borders of Palestine. Paul established churches in cities around the Mediterranean region, and his letters to these Church communities are collected in the New Testament. Peter and Paul both made mistakes. Peter denied he knew Jesus when the going got tough and Paul acted in violent ways in his efforts to crush the early Church. However, God chose them both to have special roles in the Church of Jesus Christ; Peter was leader of the apostles and Paul was the great missionary of the early Church to those who were not Jews.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

## Question 1

In the Gospels, Peter appears to be slow to understand the meaning of the message that Jesus is teaching. Spend a little time to reflect upon and list aspects of the mission of Jesus that you do not understand.

## Question 2

Think about who you might ask to help you to get a clearer picture of the meaning of the message of Jesus Christ. Work out a plan of when you can ask them.

## Question 3

Both Peter and Paul were transformed by God's Holy Spirit; for Peter it was from doubt to faith and for Paul from hatred to love. As you take this session to prayer think about what things do you want God to transform in you?

## Movie

A film that might help to explore the life of these two extraordinary apostles is *Peter and Paul*. Made in 1981, this film is directed by Robert Day and stars Anthony Hopkins. There are some good movies about Peter and Paul. The legend of Peter leaving Rome at the time of persecution and having a vision of Jesus going into Rome, asking 'Where are you going?' (the movie takes its Latin title from this question, '*Quo Vadis?*') and the presence of Peter in *The Robe* remind us of Peter's call and faith (and doubts).

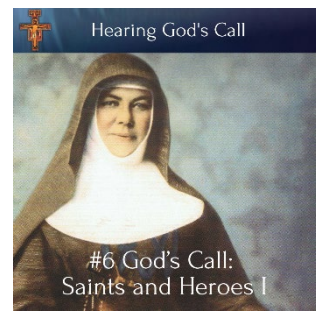
Peter appears in *Peter and Paul* but the film is best seen as the story of Saul the persecutor of Christians, who is struck down on his way to Damascus, experiences a profound conversion, changing his name to Paul, and spending his life on mission journeys. We see him visit Peter to listen to his account of Jesus' life.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a reflection on love written by St Paul as recorded in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13, verses 4-7, and verse 13:

Love is always patient and kind; love is never jealous; love is not boastful or conceited, it is never rude and never seeks its own advantage, it does not take offence or store up grievances.

Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing but finds its joy in the truth. It is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes. As it is, these remain: faith, hope and love, the three of them; and the greatest of them is love.



## Session 6

### God's Call: Saints and Heroes I

In sessions 2, 3 and 4 we explored the idea of call and response by looking at figures in the Bible. In this session we examine Saint Mary MacKillop and Saint Francis of Assisi.

*The image of Mary MacKillop (above) is used with permission of the Trustees of the Sisters of Saint Joseph. Must not be reproduced without permission of the Trustees. © 2023*

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

#### Catholics and Saints

The honouring of saints has been part of Christianity from the very beginning. The first saints were those who gave up their lives when Christians were being persecuted. Statues, pictures and stories about saints remind Catholics of those who have gone before them in faith. Saints are examples of the wide variety of ways people are called to be holy in following Jesus.

#### Saint Mary MacKillop

Mary MacKillop was an Australian woman who responded to an invitation from God and found a practical way to serve him. Mary MacKillop was born in Fitzroy, Victoria on 15 January, 1842. She was the eldest of eight children. Mary was well-educated by her father, who had earlier spent some years studying for the priesthood in Rome. From the age of 16 Mary earned her living and supported her family by working as a governess, as a clerk and as a teacher. While acting as governess to her uncle's children at Penola in South Australia, Mary met Father Julian Tenison Woods. His parish covered an area of 56,000 square kilometres and he was seeking help in the religious education of children in the outback. At the time, Mary's family depended on her income, so she was not free to take up this invitation. However, in 1866, greatly inspired and encouraged by Father Tenison Woods, Mary opened the first Saint Joseph's School in a disused stable in Penola. Young women soon came to join Mary, and the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph began to flourish. The Sisters provided practical service in education, welfare and healthcare, with a particular mission to the poor.

Throughout her life Mary MacKillop met with opposition from people outside the Church, and even from some within it. At one stage, for a short time, she was excommunicated from the Church by a bishop. In the most difficult of times, Mary consistently refused to attack those who wrongly accused her. She continued in the way she believed God was calling her and was always ready to forgive those who had wronged her. Mary suffered ill health at many times in

her life. She died on 8 August, 1909 at the convent in Mount Street, North Sydney, where she is now buried. Mary MacKillop was named a saint for the universal Church in 2010.

## **Saint Francis of Assisi**

Saint Francis is a saint who has almost universal appeal. He is loved by Catholics, admired by all Christians and respected by people of all faiths and none. Francis was born at Assisi in Italy in 1182. His father was a rich cloth merchant, and he learnt his father's trade. Somewhat proud and vain as a young man, Francis was popular and a leader amongst his friends. He wished to become a knight and, at the age of 19, took part in a war between Assisi and the neighbouring town of Perugia. During this war Francis was captured and after several months in prison, became ill. It was when he was ill that he began to turn towards God.

Still wanting to be a knight, Francis joined up again to go to another war when he was 23. However, in a dream God called Francis to abandon his plans to become a knight. He returned to his hometown and began to care for the sick. In 1206, when Francis was 24 years old, he was praying alone in a damaged church called San Damiano when he heard the figure of Christ on the cross speaking to him, calling him to repair the Church. Francis interpreted this as a call from God to repair the San Damiano church building. Responding to the call Francis took some of his father's cloth, sold it and gave the money to the priest at San Damiano. Francis then left his home and spent the next two years as a wandering beggar, hermit and restorer of dilapidated churches in the Assisi region. Others soon felt the call to join Francis and a religious order formed. The order is called the Little Brothers, or Friars Minor, or simply the Franciscans. Francis promoted a poor, simple lifestyle based on the ideals of Jesus Christ as he read them in the Gospels. Francis sent his companions throughout the world to preach about the poor, humble and crucified Christ and to bring reconciliation and peace to everyone. He died on 3 October, 1226 and was proclaimed a saint of the Church in 1228.

Mary MacKillop and Francis of Assisi each experienced a unique call from God and responded in their own way.

## **Questions**

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### **Question 1**

Saint Mary MacKillop and Saint Francis responded to God's invitation in their own way. Identify elements from the story of either saint that are significant to you.



## Question 2

Following the example of Saints Mary MacKillop and Francis recall events when you have said *yes* to God's invitation.

## Question 3

As you take this session to prayer think about where God's invitation to fullness of life may be guiding you now.

## Movie

A film that might help to explore stories of call or invitation is *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. Made in 1972, this film was directed by Franco Zeffirelli and stars Graham Faulkner. There are several films about Francis and some documentaries on Mary MacKillop.

*Brother Sun, Sister Moon* came out just after the experience of new freedoms in the 1960s and the flower power movement. Francis is always a significant figure for movements that offer criticism of the prevailing culture. He is associated with animals, with nature and with simplicity of life.

He was not always like this, and the film shows his more worldly life, his comfortable family and their expectations. It shows the challenge to this way of life, his literally stripping himself of everything in Assisi and starting a movement that has borne witness to faith values for centuries.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with the **Peace Prayer of St Francis**:

Lord make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is discord, union;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy;

for your mercy and for your truth's sake.

Divine Master,

grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled, as to console;

to be understood, as to understand;

to be loved, as to love;

for it is in giving that we receive;  
in forgiving that we are forgiven;  
and in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.



## Session 7

### God's Call: Saints and Heroes II

In this session we look at two different heroes of the Catholic Church: Dorothy Day and Saint Vincent de Paul.

#### Teaching (based on the podcast)

##### Dorothy Day

Dorothy Day was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1897 and raised in Chicago. In 1914 she went to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on a scholarship. Two years later she dropped out and moved to New York's Greenwich Village. Dorothy Day initially lived a bohemian lifestyle, with two common-law marriages and an abortion which she later wrote about in her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Eleventh Virgin*.

With the birth of her daughter, Tamar, she began a period of spiritual awakening which led her to embrace Catholicism, joining the Church in December 1927.

The Catholic Worker Movement started with the *Catholic Worker* newspaper, created to stake out a neutral, pacifist position in the incredible war-torn 1930s. This grew into a "house of hospitality" in the slums of New York City and then a series of farms where the poor could live together communally.

The Movement quickly spread to other cities in the United States, and to Canada and the United Kingdom; more than 30 independent but affiliated Catholic Worker communities had been founded by 1941.

By the 1960s Day was embraced by Catholics. Yet, although Dorothy Day had written passionately about women's rights, free love and birth control in the 1910s, she opposed the sexual revolution of the sixties, saying she had seen the ill-effects of a similar sexual revolution in the 1920s.

Dorothy Day had a progressive attitude toward social and economic rights, married with a very orthodox and traditional sense of Catholic morality and piety. She was also a member of the Industrial Workers of the World.

Prayer and a rigorous prayer life were integral to Dorothy's work. Her Rosary and her copy of the Prayer of the Church accompanied her no matter where she was, Mott Street in New York,

with sharecroppers in Alabama, in the grape fields of Delano, or indeed in Rome as an observer at Vatican II. For Dorothy Day doing good works without prayer was futile.

In March of 2000 Pope John Paul II granted the Archdiocese of New York permission to open Dorothy Day's "cause" as the first step to her being proclaimed a saint.

### **Saint Vincent de Paul**

Vincent was a man who took some time to find his true vocation. He was born in the south of France around 1580. His family survived through hard work and thrift. Encouraged by his father, Vincent sought ordination as a priest and was ordained when he was 20.

It appears that the chief reason that Vincent became a priest was his desire to get an important job in the Church. He wanted to obtain enough money to retire early, return home and provide for his family. Although he tried hard to advance his career, his early hopes for promotion in the Church came to nothing.

In 1608, Vincent moved to Paris where he came under the influence of wise teachers and a mentor. Vincent's worldly ambition then gradually receded and his attention to God increased. In 1612 Vincent found himself pastor of a poor rural parish north-west of Paris. It was here amongst the poor that he felt called by God to work more closely with people who needed help.

In 1619, King Louis XIII appointed Vincent as head chaplain of the galley convict ships. Vincent was responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of all the galley convicts of France. His people were the poorest of the poor.

Vincent had gradually experienced two types of conversion. First, he was converted to serve the poor and those in great need became the centre of his life. The second conversion was in his idea of priesthood. Vincent changed from seeing priesthood as a career, to seeing it as a personal relationship with Jesus.

By nature, Vincent was moody and tended towards being sad. He decided that he could not simply say he was made that way and could not change. During an extended period of prayer, Vincent asked God to help him change. His prayer was answered, but not all at once. In the joy of serving others, Vincent gradually came to understand the direction in which his life should go and he became less moody and less sad.

In 1625, he founded the Congregation of the Mission later known as the Vincentians. Until his death in 1660, Vincent worked tirelessly with the poor and assisted in the training of priests. With a widow named Louise de Marillac, Vincent founded a group of religious sisters called the Daughters of Charity. These Sisters gave their lives to visiting the sick in their homes, to ministering in hospitals and to caring for prisoners, orphans, the mentally ill and the homeless of Paris.

Two hundred years after the time of Vincent, the St Vincent de Paul Society was founded in France by Frederic Ozanam. This Society is made up of Catholic laypeople and was founded in the 'spirit' of St Vincent de Paul. It is often known in Australia simply as 'Vinnies'. This Society provides much needed care for the poor and marginalised people of our own time.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

Dorothy Day was passionate in her commitment to care for others in need. What do you think God is calling you to do?

### Question 2

St Vincent de Paul was moody and tended towards being sad. At one stage in his life he asked God to help him change. God answered his prayer, but not all at once. Vincent discovered that it was in the joy of serving others that he became less moody and less sad. Identify an aspect of your life that you want some help from God to change.

### Question 3

As you take this session to prayer think about the aspect of your life you want to place before God.

## Movie

A film that might help to explore stories of service to those on the margins of society is *Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story*. Made in 1996, this film was directed by Michael Ray Rhodes and stars Moira Kelly. A significant 20th century woman who experienced a call from God in the United States is Dorothy Day. The film on her life is *Entertaining Angels*. She offers encouragement to people who struggle. Not a Catholic in her early life, she lived a bohemian lifestyle with two relationships and an abortion. After her conversion, she worked tirelessly for the Catholic Worker Movement and for human rights causes. She is being considered for canonisation. *Entertaining Angels* shows her in action, an ordinary saint in a modern setting.

## Prayer

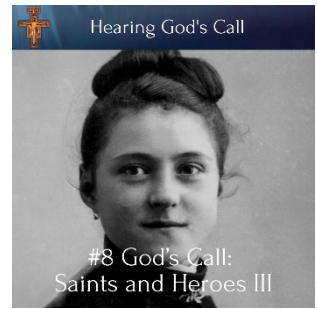
We conclude with a **Prayer for the Intercession of Servant of God Dorothy Day:**

God our Creator,

your servant Dorothy Day exemplified the  
Catholic faith by her conversion,  
life of prayer and voluntary poverty,  
works of mercy, and  
witness to the justice and peace  
of the Gospel.

May her life inspire people  
to turn to Christ as their Saviour and guide,  
to see His face in the world's poor and  
to raise their voices for the justice  
of God's kingdom.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



## Session 8

### God's Call: Saints and Heroes III

In this session we look at two different stories of call or vocation. The first story tells of a young woman Thérèse of Lisieux who found God in the midst of the small joys and sufferings of life. The second story tells of a bishop, Saint Francis de Sales who, in the midst of violence and division, wrote about the rich diversity of the Christian world.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

#### Saint Thérèse of Lisieux

Thérèse was a young woman. Although she had no grand or extraordinary experiences of God, in 1997 she was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church, one of only three women to be so proclaimed.

Thérèse Martin was born in Normandy, France, in 1873 and after seeking special permission joined the Carmelite nuns at the age of 15. Carmelite nuns live in an enclosed monastery which they very rarely leave. Their small, simple rooms are called cells.

At that time, some believed that because of sin God was angry. A common but mistaken belief was that God's anger needed to be appeased by voluntary self-punishment. These beliefs led to an image of God as a harsh judge. Observed to be a woman of holiness, Thérèse was asked by her superior to write her autobiography: *The Story of a Soul*. Through her writing, Thérèse showed how she grasped the central truth of the gospel that God's merciful saving love is for everyone, without exception.

Thérèse had a strong desire that all should know this truth and respond to God in trust, no matter what their condition, sinner or saint. Her teaching has rescued convicted criminals, alcoholics and other addicts from despair.

Thérèse died when she was 24. In her short life, however, she gave an enduring gift to the Church. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux is a special saint for missionaries and her simple way of trust has been an inspiration for countless people.

#### St Francis de Sales

Francis lived in turbulent times. During the 16th century the Church had undergone a split through the Protestant Reformation. One of the main Protestant reformers was John Calvin and his teaching had particular influence in Switzerland. In the early part of the 17th century,

Francis de Sales was appointed to be the Bishop of Geneva in Switzerland. However, he could not live in Geneva as the followers of Calvin were hostile towards Catholics.

Francis lived instead in the border region of France and from there ministered to the people of Geneva. His most famous book is called *Introduction to the Devout Life*. The following passage takes some ideas from this book and adapts them to current circumstances:

“In God’s eyes it does not make any difference if one is the prime minister, an archbishop, the chief executive officer of a large company, parents working hard to raise children, a worker on a construction site, or someone who, through illness or accident, is restricted in what they can do.

Each one is precious and special and each has a unique call. This means that each of us has a different way of praying, a different way of living, a different way of being holy, of living our life in the presence of God.”

A busy mother caring for children is not expected to live and pray like a nun. Parents working to provide for the security of their family are not expected to see buying a house and saving money as a Franciscan friar might view such activities. Real devotion consists in living one’s calling from God, living one’s particular vocation with integrity.

The call to holiness is universal. The manner in which one is holy is particular and individual. True prayer hinders nothing which is good. Through true prayer, family duties are lighter, married love truer, service to our nation more faithful.

Some Catholics are called to be priests or religious brothers or sisters. Some are called to the vocation of marriage; others still, to life as a single person. Some are called to leadership and professional service, others to labour in factories and fields. All are called to live a life of prayer and holiness in the midst of their life calling. In the eyes of God, the father working long hours on the factory floor to support his family can be living a life of holiness equal to the Carmelite nun who spends hours in solitary prayer and contemplation.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

Saint Thérèse believed that God’s merciful saving love is for everyone, without exception. Where do you see God’s saving love in your life?

### Question 2

The call to holiness is universal. The manner in which one is holy is particular and individual. True prayer hinders nothing which is good. Think about the style of prayer that suits you.



### Question 3

As you pause to pray, think about the small joys and sufferings of your life that reveal the presence of God.

### Movie

A film that might help to explore the idea of call, journey and life is *Romero*. Made in 1989, this film was directed by John Duigan and stars Raul Julia. Raul Julia brings the last years and the martyr's death of Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, to life in a powerful way. A bookish priest, Romero was made bishop at a time of oppression and civil clashes. He came to realise the plight of the poor and that his stance against injustice will lead to his death. The last five minutes of the film capture all of this as he speaks out on radio against the regime, the killers draw lots for his murder, before his death during the celebration of Mass.

Romero showed openness to the cry of the poor and transformation of understanding of what the gospel means. The director of the film, John Duigan, is not a Christian but he is quoted as saying he made the film because practising Christians ask the most interesting questions about life.

### Prayer

We conclude this session with some words from Archbishop Oscar Romero **Planning in the Kingdom:**

It helps, now and then, to step back  
and take the long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts:  
it is even beyond our vision.

Lord, we know in whom we believe.

We accomplish in our lifetime  
only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise  
that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete,  
which is another way of saying that  
the kingdom always lies beyond us.

Lord, we know in whom we believe.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted,  
knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.  
Lord, we know in whom we believe.

We cannot do everything  
and there is a sense of liberation in realising that  
this enables us to do something,  
and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete  
but it is a beginning,  
a step along the way, an opportunity  
for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

Lord we know in whom we believe.

We may never see the end results,  
but that is the difference between  
the master builder and the worker.

We are workers,  
not master builders;  
ministers,  
not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future  
not our own.



## Session 9

### The Bible

The Bible is the most printed book in history. The Bible is also referred to as Sacred Scripture or simply, the Scriptures.

Does your family have a treasured photo album, or perhaps a box of writings from relatives of previous generations? If so, then you know how useful these documents can be in capturing something of the life of your family heritage. While every moment may not be recorded in historical detail, the photos and letters certainly portray the highlights and carry a sense of your family's values and roots.

They are precious reflections of your own identity. They show you the way forward, as you endeavour to pass on to future generations the unique values that distinguish you as a family. This analogy helps us to understand a little of what the Bible means to our Church community.

In a similar way to the photo album or box of letters from past generations, the Bible is a record of our ancestor's faith, retelling their experience of God in human history.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

#### God and the Bible

The Bible is a gift from God. Through the Bible, God meets people with great love and speaks tenderly with them. The word of God in the Bible is not simply marks on paper; it is living and active when it is proclaimed in worship or meditated on in quiet prayer.

The Bible is God's gift to his people. It is a collection of different types of literature, written at different times, for different audiences, for different purposes. To say the Bible is 'inspired' does not mean that it was zapped down from the heavens or that God dictated it sentence by sentence.

What it does mean is that a community of people, attentive to the promptings of God's Spirit in their life events, felt moved to put their reflections into words.

Of all the many stories contained in the Bible, it is the story of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels that binds the different books into one volume. God can speak directly to a person through the Bible. Most completely, however, God speaks through the Bible in the Church.

## The inspiration and truth of Sacred Scripture

Christians believe that God communicates to people through the Bible. The Catholic Church affirms and proclaims that, through inspired writers, God is the author of the Bible. The Bible reveals truth because it has been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

When we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit working in our heart and mind, the Word of God becomes active in our lives. In Sacred Scripture, God speaks to us through words that were written at a particular time and place and had an original purpose. To understand the message contained in the Bible there is a need to be aware of what the sacred authors' intentions were at the time they were writing. Factors to keep in mind include major historical events, such as wars or invasions, and the language and culture of both the author and the original audience.

As we know, written information is presented in a variety of styles. Poetry and songs are different from stories or historical accounts. A passionate Hebrew prophet calling for justice or pleading to God in prayer is very different from a list of laws and regulations such as we find in the Book of Leviticus or a collection of wise sayings, as recorded in the Book of Proverbs.

## Interpreting the Bible

The Bible is inspired by God and so needs to be read and interpreted in the same spirit in which it was written.

There are three things to keep in mind for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Spirit who inspired it:

1. It is God's plan, centred in Jesus Christ, that unites the different books of the Bible as one sacred book.
2. The Church carries in her tradition the living memory of God's Word. It is the Holy Spirit who gives the Church the authority to interpret the Bible faithfully.
3. While it is the Holy Spirit who gives the Church the authority to interpret the Bible faithfully, the Church herself is always challenged to live up to the message of Jesus as revealed in the Bible.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

As you reflect on the whole Bible what image of God stands out for you?

## Question 2

As you reflect on the New Testament, particularly the Gospel stories, what image of Jesus stands out for you?

## Question 3

As you take these images to prayer think about a time or event when you had a sense of reassurance of God's presence.

## Movie

A film that might help to explore the meaning and significance of the New Testament is *The Gospel of John*. Made in 2003, it was directed by Philip Saville and stars Henry Ian Cusick. They don't make films about the writing of the Gospels or of the other books of Old and New Testaments. However, a Protestant company had the idea to make films of the Gospels, the complete texts, so that viewers would have an idea of how the Gospels were put together by including all chapters and verses in the film. They did it in the 1990s with Matthew's Gospel. They also made an Acts of the Apostles. Both films are on YouTube. Their version of John's Gospel was more widely seen.

It is a test of strength to watch the film from beginning to end, just as few would read the Gospel from cover to cover. But, looking at parts of it, we see what the Gospel says, what Jesus did, the preaching of Jesus, leading to the Passion and Resurrection.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a passage from the Gospel of John, chapter 6, verses 48-58, in which Jesus says:

'I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that a person may eat it and not die. I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.' Then the Jews started arguing among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' Jesus replied to them: 'In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

'Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person.

'As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me. This is the bread which has come down from heaven; it is not like

the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever.'



## Session 10

### The Bible and the Catholic Church

The Holy Spirit is the source of life for the Church. This one source has two aspects: The Bible and the living tradition of trustworthy teaching. This living tradition has been handed down in an unbroken line from the apostles who knew Jesus to the present time. The apostles had heard Jesus preach, witnessed his miracles and were present at the Last Supper. They had experienced Jesus risen from the dead and were present in Jerusalem where they were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

In chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles, verses 1-36, there is the account of the beginnings of the Church. This passage reports that after the Ascension of the risen Lord, when the disciples were gathered together on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles as well as the Gospel that bears his name. We know from careful study that the description of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was written in the book of Acts around 50 years after it was reported to have occurred.

### One story, four Gospels

Filled with the Holy Spirit and informed by the living memory of what Jesus did and said, the disciples wanted to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. As the disciples told of the words and actions of Jesus, they shaped the way they told the story to suit those who were listening. Somewhat similar to the situation in our own day, in Palestine around the time of Jesus there were a range of different groups, each with its own way of seeing things and doing things.

Imagine you had to tell the same story to four different groups of people. One group is made up of farmers. Another group comprises corporate high-flyers. A third group is made up of sports people. The fourth group is made up of young families.

To get the same meaning across to these four different groups of people you need to tell your story in four different ways. In each edition of the story however, the main events will be the same, but what you emphasise with one group is different to what you might want to highlight with another group.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were all writing the same story to communicate the meaning of the message of Jesus Christ to four different audiences. In the next session we examine the similarities and differences between the four Gospels and explore some of the reasons.

### **Why were the Gospels written?**

The first generation of Jewish Christians was made up of those who had known Jesus, as he had walked the roads of Palestine with them. These people had also experienced Jesus as Lord, risen from the dead.

This generation expected Jesus to return soon in glory and free them from Roman occupation and persecution. However, as members of the first generation began to die, it became clear that it would be good to collect accounts from those who knew Jesus when he was on earth, in order to record the stories in an orderly manner in the form of a Gospel.

### **Why are there only four Gospels?**

As the Church grew, the message of Jesus spread out from Palestine to places around the Mediterranean Sea. Differing accounts of the life and death of Jesus started to circulate. In time, there developed a need to identify which texts were consistent with the teachings of Jesus and the tradition of preaching that had begun with Peter and the other apostles at Pentecost.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit and in consultation with the whole Christian community, the bishops, as successors to the apostles, made a judgment that some texts were consistent with the mission and message of Jesus and other texts were not.

For the apostles, the Hebrew Scriptures formed the religious background in which they made sense of their experience of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. In the early period of the Church, at special Church councils, it was also formally decided that the Old Testament should be added to the writings of the New Testament. Around the middle of the fourth century, the Bible as we know it came into being.

### **Interpreting the Bible**

Christ taught his disciples. The disciples handed on this teaching to the next generation of Christians through their preaching and actions. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the evangelists – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – wrote the Gospels.

God communicates his Word through the Bible and tradition. The task of authentically interpreting the Word of God has been entrusted by God to the Pope and the bishops in communion with him. The Catholic Church accepts and venerates as inspired the 46 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament.



## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word “Bible”?

### Question 2

Have you ever thought of the Bible as a book that you could read or listen to? There are good, recorded versions available.

### Question 3

As you take these thoughts to prayer think about who you might be able to ask to help you in reading or listening to the stories in the Bible.

## Movie

A film that might help to explore the role of the Bible in the Catholic Church is *The Book of Eli*. Made in 2010, it was directed by Albert and Allen Hughes and stars Denzel Washington. *The Book of Eli* is an unusual film. It is set years after the destruction of America in a nuclear war. People survive, despite the poverty, hunger and looting and upstarts ruling towns. Eli, played by Denzel Washington, wanders the country with a mission. It is a biblical mission.

He has memorised the Bible and is making for a library which still exists, so that the books which have been destroyed can be written down again as he dictates them, and the world will be able to draw on the wisdom of the Bible and create communities anew.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a reading from chapter 2 of St Paul’s letter to the Christian community in Philippi:

“If our life in Christ means anything to you, if love can persuade at all, or the Spirit that we have in common, or any tenderness and sympathy, then be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind. That is the one thing which would make me completely happy. There must be no competition among you, no conceit; but everybody is to be self-effacing.

Always consider the other person to be better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of his own interests first, but everybody thinks of other people’s interests instead.”



## Session 11

### Praying the Bible

*Lectio divina* or holy reading is a slow, reflective method of praying the Bible. Through contemplating on a passage from the Bible and allowing it to enter into our daily life, this way of reading the Bible invites us to discover an underlying spiritual rhythm. Attuned to this rhythm, we have the opportunity to discover a little more about ourselves and our relationship with God.

This session is informed by a booklet called *Lectio Divina: Praying the Scriptures in Lent and Holy Week, 2011*, prepared by Bishop David Walker, the Emeritus Bishop of Broken Bay Diocese, north of Sydney.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

*Lectio divina* has five phases: **Reading, Meditation, Prayer, Contemplation** and **Action**. Each of the phases has a number of distinct steps. We now list the phases and steps before listening to the story of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at a well as recorded in the Gospel of John, chapter 4, verses 4-26. Each *lectio divina* session begins with the opening prayer:

"Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the Living God,  
teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures,  
and to discover your face there."

#### Phase 1

##### Reading: Getting to know the text

1. Take in all the elements of the text.
2. Be aware of the context, related texts, any quotes.
3. Note the key characters: what are key words?
4. Don't choose any one thing to work with at this stage.
5. You are becoming familiar with the text: gathering food for thought.

#### Phase 2

##### Meditation: Engaging with the text, making it my own

1. Here faith, life and the Word interact and seek integration.
2. What does the text tell me about the God who speaks?

3. What does it tell me about responding to that God?
4. What does the text teach me about my faith life?
5. What do I need to do to transform my life?
6. We cannot do it alone; we are humbled, we turn to God in prayer.

### **Phase 3**

#### **Prayer: Let prayer emerge from your working with this text**

1. This prayer emerges from our reading/meditation.
2. It is shaped by our personal prayer practice.
3. We seek the grace to achieve what emerged from meditation.
4. Prayer commits us to transformation of life.
5. All that we can do in prayer is done here.

### **Phase 4**

#### **Contemplation: God's response**

1. What happens here only God can give.
2. Do not expect this to happen: go with it if it does.
3. God does not wait, he breaks in and runs to meet us.
4. There is no need to be silent to let God speak.

### **Phase 5**

#### **Action: Throughout the day**

1. Now choose a word, phrase or sentence.
2. Bring it to mind frequently during the day.
3. Let it recapture the experience of your '*lectio*'.
4. Use it especially in situations relating to your '*lectio*'.
5. Daily and hourly till the soil of the heart with the Gospel plough.

## **Questions**

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. In this session we take the opportunity to practice phase one of the *lectio divina* as outlined earlier. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the points. You may want to play the recording of the reading again before doing this exercise.

A reading from the Gospel of John

Jesus had to pass through Samaria. On the way he came to the Samaritan town called Sychar near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Give me something to drink.' His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew. How is it that you ask me, a Samaritan, for something to drink?' Jews, of course, do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied to her: 'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me something to drink,' you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water'. 'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered, 'and the well is deep: how do you get this living water?'

'Are you a greater man than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?' Jesus replied: 'Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again; but no one who drinks the water that I shall give will ever be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will become a spring of water within, welling up for eternal life'. 'Sir,' said the woman, 'give me some of that water, so that I may never be thirsty or come here again to draw water'. 'Go and call your husband,' said Jesus to her, 'and come back here'. The woman answered, 'I have no husband'. Jesus said to her, 'You are right to say, 'I have no husband'; for although you have had five, the one you now have is not your husband. You spoke the truth there'. 'I see you are a prophet, sir', said the woman. 'Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, though you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship'. Jesus said: 'Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know; for salvation comes from the Jews. But the hour is coming, indeed is already here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father seeks. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth'.

The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah – that is, Christ is coming; and when he comes he will explain everything'. Jesus said, 'That is who I am, I who speak to you'.

### **Reading: Getting to know the text**

1. Take in all the elements of the text you have just heard.
2. Be aware of context, related texts and any quotes.
3. Note the key characters: what are key words?
4. Don't choose any one thing to work with at this stage.
5. You are becoming familiar with the text: gathering food for thought.

## Movie

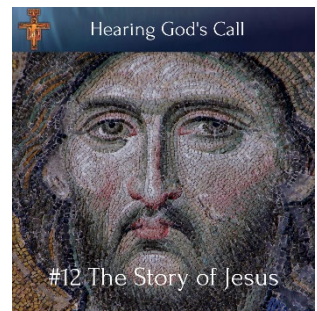
A film that might help to explore the idea of praying with the Bible is *The Gospel of John*. Made in 2003, this film was directed by Philip Saville and stars Henry Ian Cusick. While the many Gospel films on Jesus bring to life the episodes in his mission, it is *The Gospel of John* which visualises the complete text. The story of the woman at Jacob's well in chapter 4 is one of the best-known stories, the weary Jesus asking a Samaritan woman for water, Samaritans being the enemies of the Jews. She is an outsider in her own community because of her marital behaviour. Yet, it is with her that Jesus talks about living water and the role of the spirit in prayer and worship. The disciples are shocked, but have to learn that the call is for all.

Watching the story in *The Gospel of John* offers the opportunity to see the story, watch how the characters, especially Jesus and the woman, behave and hear the meditative words that lead to prayer.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a prayer from the Prayer of the Church, Thursday, Week 2, Midday.

Almighty God, You are all light,  
in you there is no darkness.  
Let your light shine upon us in all its radiance,  
so that we may walk gladly in your commandments.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.



## Session 12

### The Story of Jesus

There are many stories told in the Christian community and we have already heard some stories of Bible figures, heroes and saints. The most important story for Christians is the story of Jesus Christ, who lived, died and was raised from the dead about 2000 years ago in the region now known as Israel and the Palestinian territories.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

In the Bible in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, we are told that the conception and birth of Jesus did not occur through natural means. Jesus came to be born as a human being as the result of an extraordinary act of God, combined with the courage and generosity of the young virgin Mary, who accepted the invitation to be the mother of Jesus.

Until he was 30, Jesus lived a hidden life working as a carpenter in a small northern village called Nazareth. Just before he began his public life, Jesus was baptised by John in the Jordan River. He then spent 40 days in the desert where he was tempted by the devil to abandon his mission. It is reported in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus began his mission by announcing the Kingdom of God in his home village. However, his home village rejected him as they knew him as a local carpenter. Jesus then travelled south to the town of Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. In Capernaum he taught in the synagogue and cured a number of people. What Jesus taught made a deep impression on all who heard it. Luke's Gospel reports that after leaving Capernaum, Jesus continued to travel south and people started to join him in his travels. Among those who followed him was a special group of 12 Apostles.

As Jesus continued in his mission of preaching and healing, he was sometimes welcomed and sometimes rejected, being viewed as a threat to the established order.

To illustrate the loving compassion of God, Jesus told stories and parables using images from both rural and town settings. When he was asked about prayer, Jesus gave his followers what we now call the "Lord's Prayer" or "Our Father".

Jesus had close friends including Martha, Mary and Lazarus. He went out of his way to talk to or cure those who were on the edge of society – such as the unpopular tax collectors and those with physical conditions that made them unclean in the eyes of most people. One of the extraordinary miracles reported in the Gospels is the feeding of 5000 people. Another is Jesus

being transfigured in the company of Moses and Elijah at the top of Mount Tabor, witnessed by Peter, James and John. The story continues as follows:

For about three years, Jesus walked the roads of Palestine teaching and healing people and his reputation spread throughout the land. At that time there were men in powerful positions who were scared that what Jesus was teaching was undermining their authority. Although Jesus had a sense that it would be dangerous for him to go to Jerusalem, he resolutely took the road to that city. Jesus was welcomed in Jerusalem by a crowd waving palm leaves and he triumphantly entered the city mounted on a donkey. It was not long, however, before those who were threatened by Jesus' message put into action their plot to kill him.

Jesus shared a Passover meal with the Apostles during which, in the knowledge of his impending death, he promised a lasting memorial of himself, saying "This is my body which will be given for you; do this as a memorial of me" and "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be poured out for you."

Although he had done nothing wrong, Jesus was arrested and taken before both the Jewish and Roman authorities and was sentenced to death by crucifixion. He was forced to carry his own cross. People from the same city that had not long before triumphantly welcomed him, then mocked and taunted him as he walked to the place called Calvary.

Faithful to his mission until the end, Jesus asked the Father to forgive those who had crucified him. Jesus also comforted the good thief who was crucified with him by promising him a place in paradise. As darkness covered the whole land, he breathed his last breath and died. His dead body was wrapped in a shroud and laid in a new tomb just before sunset on the Friday. On the following Sunday morning, women from his group of followers approached the tomb to anoint the body. They found that the tomb was empty and an angel told them that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Jesus then appeared to the Apostles, spoke to them and ate with them. Jesus had risen from the dead – he was not a ghost. After 40 days, he ascended to the Father, promising the Apostles that the power of the Holy Spirit would assist them to continue his mission.

Soon after Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, filled the Apostles at the Jewish feast of Pentecost. This Pentecost event marks the beginning of the Catholic Church as God's instrument to continue the mission and message of Jesus Christ in the world.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

As you reflect on the story of Jesus what episodes surprised you?

## Question 2

What episodes from the story of Jesus are you drawn to?

## Question 3

Using the episodes identified in questions 1 and 2, how would you express them in prayer?

## Movie

A film that might help to explore the story of Jesus is *The Miracle Maker*. Made in 2000, this film was directed by Derek W. Hayes and Stanislav Sokolov and stars Ralph Fiennes.

Often people ask where they can begin to appreciate and learn about the Gospel story of Jesus. Some suggest the Gospel of Mark because it is the shortest, the most straightforward, with a lot of details in the stories. For a film which serves as a good introduction, the suggestion is *The Miracle Maker*.

What is special about *The Miracle Maker* is that it is an animation film. Jesus' story is told from the point of view of the little girl whom Jesus raised from the dead, the daughter of Jairus. It is a wonderful introduction, using three-dimension drawings for the main stories and two-dimensions for flashbacks to Jesus' infancy and the telling of the parables.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a prayer.

God of consolation

Thank you for the gift of friends and family.

To you alone, Lord, nothing is impossible.

Sometimes our lives seem small and insignificant.

However, in your eyes everyone has an important place in your plan.

Help me to find my part in your plan for the world.

Help me to discover your plan for me.

We make this prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord in whose name we pray. Amen.





#13 One Story, Four Gospels

## Session 13

### One Story, Four Gospels

In the Bible there are four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each Gospel tells the story of Jesus Christ in its own way. In this session, we explore the reason why there are four Gospels and examine the similarities and differences between them. This will help us come to a deeper understanding of the message and meaning of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

Perhaps the first question we need to ask is who wrote the Gospels? The Gospels were attributed to various writers early in the life of the Church. It must be remembered, however, that the Bible as we know it was not really settled as a collection of books until 325 at the special Church Council of Nicaea.

In tradition, *Mark* was said to have been written by John Mark of Jerusalem, *Matthew* by the tax collector and apostle of the same name, *Luke* by the physician and companion of Paul, and *John* by the son of Zebedee, one of the 12 apostles.

Through careful, detailed scholarship we now know that the Gospel attributed to Mark was written by a second-generation Christian who could write in both Aramaic and Greek around the year 70 outside of Palestine, possibly Syria.

The original audience for the Gospel according to Mark was made up of mostly Gentiles new to their faith and facing persecution. The Gospel of Mark narrates the good news about Jesus Christ with a particular emphasis on his actions and death. It seems that the reason the author wrote the Gospel was to encourage a group of Christians who were undergoing persecution.

Applying the same scholarship to the Gospel attributed to Matthew, we find that the author wrote a little later than Mark, about 80. He was a Christian who had been trained as a Jewish scribe, fluent in both Aramaic and Greek. It seems the original audience for Matthew's Gospel was a community made up of educated Christians with a Jewish background who were dealing with internal divisions and external enemies. It is interesting to note that it is in this Gospel that we get the first Christmas story telling of Christ's birth.

The Gospel of Luke was written by a Gentile Christian convert who was well-educated and skilled in the art of writing history in the style used by those who spoke Greek. It seems the

Gospel attributed to Luke was written for wealthier Gentile Christians who lived in an urban setting and were becoming complacent in their faith.

Written a little later than Matthew, in the mid-to-late 80s, the author probably wrote whilst living in a city in which Greek was the main language and Greek culture the major influence. The author of the Gospel of Luke tells us his purpose in writing his Gospel in chapter 1, verses 1-4:

“Seeing that many others have undertaken to draw up accounts of the events that have reached their fulfillment among us, as these were handed down to us by those who from the outset were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account for you, Theophilus, so that your Excellency may learn how well-founded the teaching is that you have received.”

The fourth Gospel traditionally attributed to John is something of a collection of writings from different writers collected over perhaps a 20-to-30-year span with chapter 21 added around the year 100. All of the contributors and the final editor of the fourth Gospel were Jewish Christian followers of John, known as the "beloved disciple". The original intended audience appears to have been very mixed, made up of Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans and others. Different in structure and style from the other three Gospels, the fourth Gospel does not contain the “Last Supper” or the story of the birth of Jesus.

John’s Gospel begins with a now famous phrase, “In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God”, which echoes the very first three words of the Bible: “In the beginning”, and presents Jesus as the new beginning.

When the fourth Gospel was written there was a lot of tension between Christians and Jews and this tension is reflected in some of the statements against the Jews that are contained in this Gospel. Early in the life of the Church, there was an attempt to harmonise the four Gospels into one. This move was strongly resisted at that time and still is.

The fact that there are four Gospels and the fact that while they all tell the same basic story there are differences between them with regard to details reminds us that the Bible, the word of God, was written at particular times in particular circumstance, by human beings inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is the same Holy Spirit that empowers the Church to interpret the Bible with authority.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

## Question 1

Obtain a Bible and read the two different accounts of the birth of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, verses 1-20, and the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1, verse 18 to chapter 2, verse 12. Identify the parts of the stories that are the same and the parts that are different to each other.

## Question 2

Read chapter 16 of the Gospel of Mark and see if you can recognise the two distinct endings to this Gospel. The first one ends at the end of verse 8 and the second one at the end of verse 16.

## Question 3

The Bible as it has come to us handed down in the Church is the inspired word of God. In your prayer, think about the differences between the Gospels as a mystery that invites you into a deeper relationship with God, rather than a puzzle to be solved or as errors that can be explained away.

## Movie

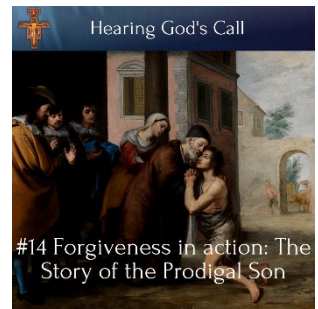
A film that might help to explore the idea of one story, four Gospels is *Jesus*. Made in 1999, this film was directed by Roger Young and stars Jeremy Sisto. While there is one story and four authors for the Gospels, there are many, many Jesus films. The one that has proven very popular with today's audiences is from 1999, made by American television for the millennium. It is called, simply, *Jesus*. He is portrayed by an actor, 25 at the time of filming, Jeremy Sisto.

This film is quite extensive in its presentation of episodes from the Gospels. What audiences like about this portrayal of Jesus is that he is very human, that audiences like him and can identify with him. But, when this Jesus is quiet and intense, he suggests that he has a deep and prayerful relationship with the Father. This portrait of Jesus combines the human and the divine.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a prayer from the Prayer of the Church, Week 1, Wednesday, Morning Prayer.

God our Saviour,  
Through the grace of baptism  
you made us children of light.  
Hear our prayer that we may always walk in that light  
and work for truth as your witness before men and women.  
We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



## Session 14

### Forgiveness in Action: The Story of the Prodigal Son

In this session we explore the story of the Prodigal Son. The full story can be found in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15, verses 11-32.

#### Teaching (based on the podcast)

We begin. A father has two sons. The younger son asks his father for his inheritance. Normally inheritance would be distributed after the father had died. In response to the request the father divides the land in two and gives half the property to the younger son. After a few days, the son gathers all the money he now has and goes off to live a wayward life in a distant land. In a short time, the young son spends all of his money on gambling, drinking and women. Then a famine hits the land and the young man finds himself homeless and hungry.

Eventually he finds work feeding pigs. In the culture in which this story was first told, pigs were viewed as unclean, and feeding them was the worst job that a young Jewish man could imagine. From this low point in his life, the young son thinks to himself that the servants at his old home are better off than he currently is. He realises he has made a mess of his life so far and decides to return home to ask his father if he can work for him as a servant.

The father of the young man hears news that his son is making the journey home. Even though his son was still some distance from home, the father rushes out to embrace him and welcome him.

In response to the father's warm embrace the young man attempts to say he is sorry. The young man knows that he deserves to be treated as one who is less than a servant. He announces that he has no right to be called son by his father.

The father hardly lets him finish his sentence; he is not interested in the details. He is simply overjoyed that his son has returned home. The father then orders that the young man be dressed in the best clothes and he throws a lavish party in his honour.

The older brother coming in from the fields hears the noise of the party, but he refuses to join in the celebration. The older brother is confused and disappointed and says to his father, "Why throw a party for him? He went off and spent all of the money, whereas I have stayed here, been loyal, worked like a slave and yet you have not even thrown a small party for me." The father replies to the older boy, "My son, you are always with me, all that I have is yours. The son

whom I thought was dead has returned. Please come and join me and the others in celebrating his return”.

For some people, this story is a model of the sacrament of Confession or Reconciliation.

The sacrament of Confession is concerned with the healing of damaged relationships. The first movement in the rite of confession begins well before a priest is involved and is related to an uneasy feeling we experience deep within. The feeling of unease or ache often indicates that a relationship that is important to us has been damaged or broken.

While it may sound a little strange, we can also feel an ache if we have damaged the image of ourselves as we would like to be. That is, the disappointment in knowing that we have let ourselves down and in doing so probably caused some suffering for someone we care about deeply.

The image of confession that perhaps we heard as a child is one in which the record of our sin is wiped clean from a slate and we are ready to start again. Another way to think about confession is as the power of love to heal and restore broken relationships. Confession can be also seen as the power of love to heal our own sense of damaged worth.

In the story of the prodigal son, it is only when the younger son realises that he has done the wrong thing, when he hits rock bottom, that he decides to begin the long journey back to his home. His father came out to meet him while he was still a long way from home. The father embraced him, dressed him in fine clothes and arranged for a celebration.

It is the same with our relationship with God. Through things we have done we may have disappointed ourselves in our relationship to God. Through the sacrament of Confession, we can allow God to heal our wounded sense of self-esteem and self-worth.

Our relationship with God gets damaged when we fail to act in a manner that makes us most human, that is, when we fail to act wisely in being forgiving, generous and concerned about others.

God’s love for us is unconditional. It does not depend on our doing the right thing. The offer of forgiveness is a gift from God. To receive the gift of forgiveness and allow the damaged relationship to be healed, we need to admit that we have done something wrong and that we are in need of forgiveness.

The sacrament of Confession is free and available to all members of the faithful who seek it from a priest.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

What is your experience of being welcomed?

### Question 2

When have you welcomed others?

### Question 3

What sense of gratitude can I give expression to in my prayer?

## Movie

A film that might help to explore the theme of forgiveness is *Jesus of Nazareth*. Made in 1977, the script for this film was written by a team including Anthony Burgess and Suso Cecchi d'Amico and stars Robert Powell. We can read the parable of the prodigal son or hear it proclaimed in the church, but it is limited by our own capacity or that of the preacher for dramatising it.

Franco Zeffirelli made a more than six-hour version of the Gospels in the 1970s with Robert Powell as Jesus. It is *Jesus of Nazareth*. His version of the prodigal son is one of the best because we see and hear Jesus telling the story. We also see the room where Jesus goes to eat with the prostitutes and tax collectors. Peter refuses to go in (like the older brother) because Matthew, the host, has taxed Peter. But, after listening to the parable outside, Peter is touched, able to go in and be reconciled with Matthew. He puts the parable of forgiveness into practice.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a prayer:

God of forgiveness and compassion,

You tell us through your Scriptures that it is when we are weak that we are strong.

Help me to be open to accept your generous gift of forgiveness,

help me to believe that I can be forgiven by you.

Loved and forgiven by you, help me to forgive those whose actions have hurt me deeply.

I make this prayer through Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Amen.



## Session 15

### The Church in History: Always Changing, Always the Same

If it has been sometime since you have been to Mass, when you return you might feel that yes, Mass is the same, but there have been many changes. Just like the changes in the Mass that have occurred in the past and will occur in the future, there have been many changes in the long history of the Church. The changes reflect movements in culture and in the ways we express our faith. However, God's revelation of himself to us and our faith in God remain the same.

#### Teaching (based on the podcast)

We have heard in previous sessions that the Church came into being at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on Mary and the apostles in Jerusalem. This event occurred around 2000 years ago, in the context of a culture very different from our own.

In the time since the Pentecost event, the Church has spread throughout the whole world. The Good News of Jesus Christ risen from the dead has been handed down, generation to generation, and recorded in Scripture. In this session, we look at the story of the Church as it has worked to be faithful to its mission in continuing the message of Jesus Christ.

The story begins with the major change that occurred when the first Christians moved from Palestine into the Roman Empire around the Mediterranean Sea. Non-Jewish people then became Christians. Then came a series of persecutions and many Christians died for the faith. It is from this period that we have the stories of lions and Christians.

A major change occurred in 313 when the Emperor Constantine declared that Christianity could be practiced in the Roman Empire. Over the next hundred years, the Roman Empire began to decline and the rulers of the Empire became less influential. The task of civil management of the whole of society then fell to bishops and abbots.

The result of this development was that Church and the State became closely aligned in the era known as Christendom. Around this time, some Christians left society and became monks. Firstly, some Christians went into the desert by themselves, and then as others joined them, monasteries developed. For many centuries monks were role models for Christians.

In the 13th century a new movement began, consisting of groups of wandering preachers. Associated with this movement were urban religious communities including the Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and Augustinians.

These 'friars' or 'brothers' followed the Gospel practice of living in poverty. They depended on the gifts of others to support themselves and their works as they moved from town to town. You might remember that we heard the story of St Francis in session six.

In the middle of the 16th century after Martin Luther, Henry VIII and others broke with the Church, the leaders of the Church met at the Council of Trent to initiate a Catholic Reformation.

Results from this series of events included new spiritual movements like the Jesuits and the establishment of seminaries for the training of priests. Negatively, at this time the Church became defensive, as if it were under siege. For the next 300 years the Church was in and out of favour with governments in Europe. This was particularly true in the 18th century with the period of the Enlightenment and Revolution. During this time there was a great missionary drive as priests followed explorers into the newly-surveyed areas of the Americas, Africa and Asia.

This was also a period when many saints were given to the Church, including St Vincent de Paul, whose story we heard in session seven.

The 20th century, a period of great change and international conflict, was also the century of the laity, when lay parishioners were urged to become active members of the Church. The Second Vatican Council, begun by Pope John XXIII in 1962 and completed by Pope Paul VI in 1965, brought changes to Catholic experience. Some people in the Church are still getting used to some of these changes.

The towering figure of the Church in the years after Vatican II was Pope John Paul II, who was Pope from 1978 until 2005. John Paul II is considered by many to be a saint and following his beatification in April 2011, it is anticipated that he will soon be canonised a saint for the universal Church [Note: John Paul II was canonised on April 27, 2014].

While there has been almost constant change in the Church, we can be sure that there has been no new revelation to replace the revelation given through Jesus Christ. There has been no new Bible written; and there has been founded no new church to link us with Christ.

Despite all of the changes in custom, ritual, language, art and ways of thinking that have occurred throughout history, the Church today is the same historical institution, founded by Christ, that took shape at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on Mary and the Apostles.

The Catholic Church is the same historical institution which boasts St Peter as the first Bishop of Rome, or Pope. It embraces St Paul as its great missionary and writer who, in the first century, moved throughout the Mediterranean region preaching Christ to all who would listen.



## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

What do you think it means to say you belong to a Church?

### Question 2

Describe your experience of belonging to a Church.

### Question 3

List the ways you think the Holy Spirit is inviting you to belong to a Church.

## Movie

A film that might be helpful for looking at the topic of the Church to is *The Shoes of the Fisherman*. Made in 1968, this film was directed by Michael Anderson and stars Anthony Quinn.

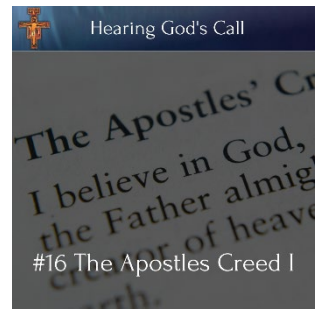
*The Shoes of the Fisherman* is based on a Morris West novel of 1963. It was considered ‘prophetic’ because it imagined a very different Church from that of the 1950s: a Slavic pope from an iron curtain country, a travelling pope dealing with world crises of hunger as well as differing interpretations of Church teaching. The film version was released in 1968 when many of the changes were being put into practice but John Paul II was still 10 years away.

The film shows the pomp and style of the older traditions in the scenes of the election of the pope. The TV linkups with Russia and China and the plane travel show the style of the newer Church.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a prayer from the Prayer of the Church, Week 1, Friday, Morning Prayer.

Lord God,  
You hold out the light of your Word  
to those who do not know you.  
Strengthen in our hearts the fire you have given us,  
so that no trials may quench the fire  
your Spirit has kindled within us.  
We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.



## Session 16

### The Apostles' Creed I

This is the first of two sessions in which we explore an early Christian statement of belief. Among some members of the early Christian community there arose disagreements as to what Jesus taught and the meaning of his teaching. In time, as the Christian community grew larger, there arose a need to create a list of the most important aspects of the Christian faith. The apostle Paul wrote letters to the various Christian communities that he established around the Mediterranean Sea.

In a number of his letters, Paul includes some very early summaries of the Christian faith. For examples of these lists made by Paul, see chapter 1 of the Letter to the Ephesians, chapter 2 of the Letter to the Philippians and chapter 1 of the Letter to the Colossians.

One of the collections or lists of teachings that grew in importance in the early Church is a piece of writing called the Apostles' Creed. In legends it was once told that the apostles themselves wrote this creed and each of the 12 main points was attributed to one of the apostles.

In fact, the Apostles' Creed was the profession of faith used at the rite of Baptism in the Church in Rome. The Apostles' Creed is still used in the Church today as a summary of the main Christian beliefs and as one of the prayers that make up the Rosary.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

In this session, we explore the first three points made in the Creed, the other nine are addressed in the next session.

Before we begin our examination, let us listen to this ancient prayer which captures the main teachings of Christianity in a nutshell:

I believe in God the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth.  
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended into hell;

the third day He rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven,  
and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty,  
from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body  
and life everlasting. Amen.

The first line names **God the Father**, the Creator of heaven and earth, as almighty. In this description we have an image of God as powerful and creative, as the one who is the source of everything that exists. God is the source of all that we can see on earth and in space and God is the source of heaven which is beyond our imagination.

The second line begins with the proclamation that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the anointed one of God, the Christ. While he is from the town of Nazareth, Jesus is, at the same time, God's only Son and one with God the Father.

In the next phrase, **our Lord**, the "our" identifies Jesus as one like us, and with the term "Lord" Jesus is named as one who is above us. In the very next line, we are told how it can be that Jesus is both like us and at the same time above us.

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. The Creed states that Jesus was conceived in an extraordinary way by the Holy Spirit and was born of a woman named Mary. To emphasise the extraordinary nature of his conception, Mary is identified as a virgin.

In these first three stanzas of this ancient Christian Creed, we find two of the central teachings of the Church. The first is that we believe in one God as Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Secondly, that God the Son, in a way we do not fully understand, was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born as a baby to a young virgin named Mary.

In the next session we are to explore the rest of the Apostles' Creed. For the moment, you might want to spend a little time reflecting on an idea from the Creed and to view it not as a problem to be solved, but as a mystery that invites us into the very heart of God.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

In light of the Apostles' Creed, express your own statement of faith.

## Question 2

What is your experience of standing by your faith?

## Question 3

Sometimes our faith is tested. Identify elements of the mystery of your faith that you want to bring to prayer.

## Movie

A film that might help to explore the theme of Church teaching is *A Man for All Seasons*. Made in 1966, the screen play for this film was written by Robert Bolt, it was directed by Fred Zinnemann and stars Paul Scofield. They don't make films about the development of Church teaching except in documentaries.

However, in looking at *A Man for All Seasons*, we see a period of history where the Chancellor of England faces a crisis with the divorce of Henry VIII. He has to look to his principles, including the creed of faith which sustains his convictions. Thomas More, the man for all seasons, is executed, declaring that he was the King's true subject, but God's subject first. Thomas More was an intelligent and educated man who was faced with a political crisis that was both secular and religious. It was also a time of upheaval in the Church. With the Reformation and dissent within the Church there was a need to ensure that the Creed and Church teaching were clear and worth dying for.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a reading from the first chapter of Luke's Gospel, verses 26-36.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?'

The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God.'



## Session 17

### The Apostles' Creed II

In this session we explore the meaning of the last nine points that make up this ancient prayer.

#### Teaching (based on the podcast)

We begin with the fourth stanza.

**Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead**

In this stanza Pontius Pilate, the Prefect or administrator of the Roman province of Judaea, is named. In specifically naming Pontius Pilate as the one in charge in Judaea at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, the Creed affirms that Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried at a specific time, in a specific place. Jesus was crucified around the year 30 AD on a hill called Calvary just outside Jerusalem.

We continue with the phrase **He**, (that is, Jesus) **descended into hell**. The term “hell” in this context has a very specific meaning. At the time the Creed was written hell was understood as the region of the dead, not the hell of the damned. It was the state of all those, good and evil, who had died before Christ. The line emphasises the fact that Jesus suffered the fate of all who die.

The next phrase **the third day He rose again from the dead** locates the resurrection of Jesus in time, counting the day of his crucifixion, Good Friday, as the first day and Easter Sunday as the third day. Jewish scholars at the time of Jesus thought of the third day symbolically, as when life is to be restored to the dead.

Stanza number six reads **He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty**. In this short sentence there is the affirmation of the belief that after completing his mission of saving humanity through the mystery of the cross and resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven. In the conception of Jesus, the Word of God became united with humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. In the Ascension, Jesus, fully God and fully human, risen from the dead, takes our humanity into the very heart of God.

In the next stanza the Creed affirms that at the end of time Jesus, the Lord of the cosmos and of history and the Redeemer of the world, is to come again to judge the living and the dead. In this

judgement the secrets of hearts will be brought to light as well as the conduct of each one toward God and toward his or her neighbour.

The eighth stanza states succinctly **I believe in the Holy Spirit**. There are many symbols of the Holy Spirit: living water which springs from the wounded heart of Christ on the cross as described in chapter 19, verse 34, of the Gospel of John; and ‘fire’ which transforms what it touches, as at Pentecost described in chapter 2, verses 1-13, of the Acts of the Apostles. And the ‘dove’ which descended on Christ at his baptism and remained with him, as described in chapter 3, verses 16-17 of Matthew’s Gospel. God the Holy Spirit is the name of the third Person of the Blessed Trinity.

The next stanza contains a combination of two closely connected things, **the holy Catholic Church** and the **communion of saints**. All human beings in various ways belong to or are ordered to the Catholic unity of the people of God.

Those who are baptised but are not in full Catholic unity share a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church. Those who are joined to the Church by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments, Church government and communion, are fully incorporated into the Catholic Church.

The expression **communion of saints** first of all refers to the common sharing of all the members of the Church in holy things, for example the faith, the sacraments, especially Holy Communion, and the other spiritual gifts.

The ground of the communion of saints is love which “does not seek its own interests” but leads the faithful to “hold everything in common”, even to put one’s own material goods at the service of the most poor. Our relationship with those who have died is explored in session 20 of this program.

### **I believe in the forgiveness of sins**

The chief sacrament for the forgiveness of sins is Baptism. For those sins committed after Baptism, Christ instituted the sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance. Through this sacrament, a baptised person is reconciled with God with others and with the Church.

### **I believe in the resurrection of the body**

After death, which is the separation of the body and the soul, the body becomes corrupt while the soul, which is immortal, goes to meet the judgment of God and awaits its reunion with the body when it will rise transformed at the time of the return of the Lord.

How the resurrection of the body will come about exceeds the possibilities of our imagination and understanding.

## **I believe in life everlasting**

Eternal life is that life which begins immediately after death. It will have no end. It will be preceded for each person by a particular judgment at the hands of Christ who is the Judge of the living and the dead. This particular judgment will be confirmed in the final judgment.

### **Questions**

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button following each statement and instruction to spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

#### **Question 1**

What has supported you in developing your faith?

#### **Question 2**

Who or what has supported you in standing by your faith?

#### **Question 3**

List people or things that you can call on now to continue to stand by your faith.

### **Movie**

A film that might help to explore what Christians believe is *The Mission*. Made in 1986, the screen play for this film was written by Robert Bolt, it was directed by Roland Joffé and stars Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons. The best Christians are those who practise what they preach, what they believe. They may or may not be able to recite the Creed, but they live what they profess. In a film like *The Mission*, set in South America in the 18th century, we see Fr Gabriel working with the Indians, sharing life and faith with them.

We also see Mendoza, the slave hunter who experiences a conversion, joining the missionaries, holding on to his possessions until he can't carry them any longer and lets them go. This enables him to believe in the Church and its teachings and to go out to fight in solidarity with the Indians against the oppressors, while Fr Gabriel joins them as they are killed.

### **Prayer**

We conclude this session with a prayer inspired by the writings of the Oblate priest Fr Ron Rolheiser OMI.

Jesus, after you rose from the dead you were seen by some and not by others.

Some understood your message, others did not.

For some, your message changed their lives, for others it did not affect them.

There were those, however, that did understand what had happened but hardened their hearts against it.

I pray for those who reject your message of hope and forgiveness.

Help me to believe. Amen.





## Session 18

### The Ten Commandments

In the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament, God gives Moses many laws related to a whole range of matters, from taxation and slavery to instructions on building an altar and furnishing a sacred space. Out of all of those laws and instructions, 10 are set aside as having special significance. These 10 are described in Exodus, chapter 31, verse 18, as being written with the “finger of God”, that is, they are special amongst the large list of commandments and instructions.

#### Teaching (based on the podcast)

If we observe a group of children playing a game together, it is not unusual to hear the cry “unfair, unfair” as one or perhaps a group of children express their feeling that a rule of the game has been broken.

If you were to ask the children about the rule book of the game, more likely than not they would look at you quizzically and say, “there is no rule book, everyone knows the rules”. As adults, we too may also call out “unfair”, perhaps even shouting in anger, as we feel deep within that we, or someone we love, have not been treated justly.

Deep within our hearts and minds, God has planted a sense of what is right and what is wrong. Sometimes we only become aware of this deeply embedded sense of right and wrong when we experience something as being unjust. In fact, it is correct to say that God’s laws are written on our hearts, or to use another metaphor, they are written into our very DNA.

While a ‘sense’ of right and wrong is written into our DNA, it is sometimes difficult for us to work out ‘exactly’ what is right or wrong, because our ability to read the promptings from our heart is diminished.

One cause of this reduction in our ability to get in touch with our own heart is the hearing or telling of lies. Specifically, the lies told by others or perhaps the lies we tell ourselves as we attempt to justify doing things that we know in our heart of hearts to be wrong.

It is at this point that our need for God becomes most urgent and the need for a code or law to assist us in orienting ourselves to do the right thing makes sense.

The Ten Commandments stands as an enduring set of signposts that help us orient ourselves towards God and into the fullness of life.

When we obey the Ten Commandments, the revelation of God's law to Moses resonates deeply with what we know in our heart to be the right thing. The gift of the Ten Commandments is part of the covenant God sealed with his people on Mount Sinai.

The first of the Commandments recalls that above all else God loves his people. The Commandments are important but they are secondary to God's love for his people. They express the implications of belonging to God through the establishment of the covenant. Our moral life is a response to God who loves us personally.

### **The Ten Commandments in the Life of the Church**

From the time of St Augustine in the late fourth century, the Ten Commandments have had a special place in the Church, in the catechesis of candidates for baptism and in providing clear guidelines for the faithful.

The Ten Commandments state what is required in the love of God and love of neighbour. The first three concern love of God and the other seven love of neighbour. We now hear a list in which the commandments are abbreviated for teaching purposes.

1. I am the LORD your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the LORD'S Day.
4. Honour your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
9. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.

The Ten Commandments form a coherent whole. Each of the commandments depend on the others and they form an organic unity. To transgress one commandment is to infringe all the others. One cannot honour another person without blessing God in whose image he or she is created.

You cannot adore God without loving all men and women, his creatures. The Ten Commandments bring our religious and social life into unity, they are part of God's revelation and they teach us what it is to be truly human.

In a sense the Ten Commandments have been doubly revealed to humanity. Firstly, they are written on the hearts of all humans. But because of the effects of sin, our ability to read our hearts has been distorted. Secondly, they have been revealed and recorded in the Bible.

No one can ignore the Ten Commandments because they are engraved by God in the human heart. When the effects of sin are cleared away, we can see plainly that the Ten Commandments reflect the law written in our hearts. It is only in and through Jesus Christ that the effects of sin can be cleared from the human heart. It is only in and through Jesus Christ that we can be made holy.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

The Ten Commandments tell us how to live a good life, a life of virtue. What are some important virtues for you?

### Question 2

What is your experience of standing by the virtues that are important to you?

### Question 3

In what ways have your virtues been important in developing your relationship with God?

## Movie

A film that might help to explore the Ten Commandments is *Bruce Almighty*. Made in 2003, this film was directed by Tom Shadyac and stars Jim Carrey and Morgan Freeman. The writer and director, Tom Shadyac, has made a film with a difference: he has made a comedy about weak human beings, about God, about conversion and understanding the commandments.

It is *Bruce Almighty*, with Jim Carrey. Carrey represents the selfish and ambitious man who unexpectedly encounters God and learns more than a lesson or two and whose life is changed around. Since God is played by Morgan Freeman, he sounds rather God-like in the best way, and has a whole lot of lines filled with down-to-earth wisdom that covers all the issues that we have to face and which are expressed in the Ten Commandments.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a prayer.

God, you shine when all seems dark.  
You know all our disappointments.  
Transform our grief into hope. Amen.



## Session 19

### The Beatitudes: Blessings from God

In the last session we explored the Ten Commandments as God's gift to his people and as a sure guide for action. In session 13 of this program, we heard about the reason why there are four Gospels with each of the Gospel writers or evangelists shaping their Gospel to tell the story of Jesus to a particular audience.

In this session, we explore the relationship between the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Ten Commandments as portrayed in the collection of sayings that have come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

We begin by recounting the dramatic story of Moses receiving the Commandments on the top of Mount Sinai as portrayed in Exodus, chapter 19, verses 16-25:

At daybreak on the third day there were peals of thunder and flashes of lightning, dense cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast; and, in the camp, all the people trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God; they took their stand at the bottom of the mountain.

Mount Sinai was entirely wrapped in smoke, because YAHWEH had descended on it in the form of fire. The smoke rose like smoke from a furnace and the whole mountain shook violently. Louder and louder grew the trumpeting. Moses spoke, and God answered him in the thunder. Yahweh descended on Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain, and Yahweh called Moses to the top of the mountain; and Moses went up. Later coming down the mountain Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.

In another version of the same story in chapter 24 of the Book of Exodus, verses 16-18, we find the following:

The glory of Yahweh rested on Mount Sinai and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day Yahweh called to Moses from inside the cloud.

To the watching Israelites, the glory of Yahweh looked like a devouring fire on the mountain top. Moses went right into the cloud and went on up the mountain. Moses stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

In this version of the story, we find an echo of the six days of creation from the first account of creation in Genesis, chapter 1, and a reference to Moses staying in the cloud on top of the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights.

We will shortly hear why these elements of the story are important as we begin our exploration of the Sermon on the Mount.

The scripture scholars tell us that in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is depicted as the new Moses. This idea is particularly evident in what has come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew, chapters 5 to 7. In these chapters, Matthew compares Jesus with Moses. Just as Moses climbed Mount Sinai to receive the Law from God, Jesus climbs a hill.

It is interesting to note that in Luke's account of the same event which he writes of in chapter 6, verse 17, of his Gospel, the sermon is given with Jesus standing on a level piece of ground. And where Moses stayed on the mountain in the cloud for 40 days and 40 nights to prepare to receive the Law, Jesus prepares for his ministry by spending 40 days and 40 nights in the desert. See Matthew, chapter 4, verse 1.

While there are many similarities between how both Moses and how Jesus are portrayed, there are also differences. Whereas Moses received the Law from God, Jesus gives the new Law. Many of the passages in this sermon given by Jesus begin with the words "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times". This is then followed by "But I say to you".

Jesus is the new Law-giver. At the same time, however, Jesus tells the crowd, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets: I have come not to abolish but to fulfil". In saying this, Jesus was both affirming the Ten Commandments and completing them. For Jesus, the intentions of the heart are the foundation of good actions.

The centrepiece of the Sermon on the Mount is a collection of sayings that have come to be known as the Beatitudes:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you'.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button following each statement and instruction to spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

For Jesus, the intentions of the heart are the ground or foundation of good actions. In light of how Jesus views people, who do think is blessed?

### Question 2

What is your experience of being blessed?

### Question 3

As you bring this session to prayer think of someone special that you would like God to bless and ask him to bless them.

## Movie

A film that might help to explore the Sermon on the Mount is *Hotel Rwanda*. Made in 2004, this film was directed by Terry George and stars Don Cheadle. In finding a film about people who are poor in spirit, merciful, peacemakers, who hunger and thirst for justice, *Hotel Rwanda* is a good example. It is set in recent history, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, with Hutus hounding Tutsis to death.

Based on actual events, the film centres on Paul, a Hutu, the manager of a prominent hotel in Kigali. His wife is a Tutsi. He is a good man who tries his best to assist those in need, rescue Tutsis, and help people cope with the violence and misery that has disrupted their lives. He stands for what the beatitudes declare.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a scripture passage from chapter 2 of Luke's Gospel used each night in the Prayer of the Church:

At last, all powerful Master,  
you give leave to your servant  
to go in peace, according to your promise.  
For my eyes have seen your salvation  
which you have prepared for all nations,  
the light to enlighten the Gentiles  
and give glory to Israel.



## Session 20

### Life After Death

The tragedy of Jesus crucified, the mystery of the Church, the Scriptures, and the sacraments only make sense when they are viewed in the light of Jesus risen from the dead. Without the Resurrection, the stories of Jesus are reduced to the reported sayings and actions of a holy and wise, wandering preacher.

In this session we explore the notion of life after death as understood by the Catholic Church.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

We begin with a story which comes from John. “Our school principal was a much-loved and respected member of the local Catholic community. The news of her cancer hit us hard. We were shocked at the rapid deterioration of her health. For a while I felt numb with anger. How senseless that this gifted and energetic woman should die now!

“Her funeral was an event which will remain in my memory for years to come. The Church was packed wall-to-wall with people. The ceremony was rich and uplifting. You could feel the whole congregation lifting her up to God. Afterwards, a guard of honour of school students lined the street. Despite the sadness of the situation, there was also a great feeling of victory.

“Back at the school hall afterwards, the atmosphere was abuzz with stories and memories – happy and poignant, funny and serious – of how this wonderful woman had touched our lives. I felt my anger thawing into the beginnings of new hope. No, death is not the end. The saints – like Sr Helen – live on in heaven.”

Catholics believe that the resurrection of our bodies is to be in the pattern of Christ’s resurrection. This being the case, we do well to examine the nature of Christ’s resurrection which was not a return to earthly life. In the Gospels, it is reported that Jesus brought back to life Lazarus, the young man of Nain and Jairus’ daughter. The Lazarus story is told in the Gospel of John, chapter 11, verses 1-45, the story of the young man of Nain is in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 7, verses 11-17, and for the story of the raising of Jairus’ daughter, see the Gospel of Mark, chapter 5, verses 21-43.

While these events were miracles and signs of Christ’s union with the Father, the three individuals raised from the dead would die again at a later date.

In the resurrection of Christ, we have something different. Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, passed from death to another life, to life beyond what we normally see, feel or hear.

The Gospels record that Christ's resurrection is an event that occurred at a particular time in a particular place. Specifically, it occurred on the first day of the week at the tomb where they had laid him. Christ's resurrection, however, breaks through the boundaries of time and space to reveal something of the mystery of God.

How our bodies are to be raised is beyond our present understanding. In faith, however, we believe that with the return of Christ we will be complete in the pattern of Christ's resurrection and our bodies also will be raised from the dead to dwell in heaven eternally.

### **Heaven, Purgatory and Hell**

Heaven is the state of supreme and definitive happiness. Those who die in the grace of God and have no need of further purification are gathered around Jesus and Mary, the angels and the saints.

They form the Church of heaven, where they see God "face to face". They live in a communion of love with the Most Blessed Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Purgatory is the state of those who die in God's friendship, assured of their eternal salvation, but who still have need of purification to enter into the happiness of heaven.

Hell consists in the eternal damnation of those who die in mortal sin through their own free choice. The principal suffering of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone we can have the life and happiness for which we were created and for which we long.

Christ proclaimed this reality with the words, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire," Matthew, chapter 25, verse 41. While God desires all to come to repentance, by nature humans are free and responsible and God respects our decisions. It is the person who freely excludes himself from communion with God, if at the moment of death he persists in mortal sin and refuses the merciful love of God.

Judgment will come at the end of the world and only God knows the day and the hour.

### **Heaven, earth and God's creation**

Heaven and earth are united deep within God's creation. Earth is not heaven and heaven is not earth but, in Christ, heaven and earth are intimately united to each other. Earth is the world of men and women and every living creature.

Heaven is the dwelling place of God, angels and saints, including Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus.



## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

What is your understanding of life after death?

### Question 2

What does it mean to you that your body and soul will be reunited on the last day in the pattern of Jesus risen from the dead?

### Question 3

In the knowledge that we can pray for those in purgatory and pray with those in heaven, who are the people that you would like to bring to mind in your prayer?

## Movie

A film that might help to explore life after death is *Molokai*. Made in 1999, this film was directed by Paul Cox and stars David Wenham.

*Molokai* is the story of the 19th century Belgian missionary, Fr Damian. He worked in Hawaii and volunteered to live with the lepers on Molokai, which meant that he could never leave because of the contagious disease.

In being with them (which is what the film shows), he shows the communion of saints on earth. Because his ministry to the lepers and his comfort of them is to help them to go through this life with faith in the next, he shows us that after this life, after the suffering, there is a fuller life, a fuller communion with one another in God's presence.

The film has many scenes, encounters and discussions between Damian and the lepers, which bring home these truths.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a prayer:

God of surprises,  
All of life reflects your beauty.  
Grant to me a glimpse of your splendour,  
in the wonder of nature,  
in the power of weather,  
and in the laughter and tears of those with whom I share my life.



## Session 21

### The Lord's Prayer

“The Lord’s Prayer”, or “Our Father” as it is also called, is perhaps the world’s best-known prayer. The reason it is called the Lord’s Prayer is that it was given to the apostles by Jesus himself.

As there are two different versions of the prayer, it seems that for the writers of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that faithfulness to the thinking and intention of Jesus was more important than an exact reproduction of the words that he said. See the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6, verses 9-13, and a shorter version in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 11, verses 2-4.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

The author of the Gospel of Matthew places the Our Father between the Beatitudes and a collection of teachings on a whole range of things from attitudes to money to judging, as part of the series of teachings that has come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount. See Matthew, chapters 5, 6 and 7, where Jesus is described as climbing a hill in the first verse of chapter 5 and as coming down from the mountain in the first verse of chapter 8.

The author of the Gospel of Luke locates the Lord’s Prayer in a different context with a focus on Jesus as a man of prayer. In the Gospel of Luke, the Our Father is immediately preceded by the story of Martha and Mary and is followed by two short passages, one on persistence in prayer and the other on effective prayer. See Luke, chapter 10, verse 38 to chapter 11, verse 13.

Matthew’s version of the Our Father is the one used most often in prayer. Translated with a view to being used in both public and private prayer, it reads:

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

In the passage immediately preceding the Lord's Prayer in Matthew, chapter 6, verse 7, Jesus instructs the apostles to keep their prayers short and sharp, telling them directly, "In your prayers do not babble as the Gentiles do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard." And in verse 8, "Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him".

The clear instruction from Jesus is that God knows us all intimately, including what we need, and there is no need to go on and on in our prayer as if we were asking a distant, harsh judge who needs to be convinced by clever arguments.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus, as listener to the Father, reflects on the fruits of his own prayer experience. Adopting the prayer form of a psalm, Jesus shares his experience of the Father as the intimate family member who can be approached in trust and confidence.

The prayer begins with a focus on God, "Our Father, who art in heaven." In this line, two images are brought together which are seemingly at odds. The image of God as "father", as intimate family member, who at the same time is in heaven, a place or state that is beyond our imagination and understanding.

The next line "hallowed be thy name", is a blessing which may also be translated as "blessed be the name of the Lord".

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven", is the next stanza. Here we have Jesus telling us in prayer that the Kingdom of God, a future kingdom of forgiveness, love, peace and justice, is still to come.

With the line "give us this day our daily bread", the prayer moves to a concern for necessities of life.

The next stanza, "and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us", is sometimes misunderstood to mean that God will only forgive us to the extent that we forgive those who have done something against us. This is not the case. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have access to radical forgiveness from God, and no sin is beyond forgiveness.

The sin against the Holy Spirit that is said to be beyond forgiveness is the sin of deliberately not taking up the opportunity to receive the forgiveness of God. It is because we have been forgiven by God that we have the capacity to forgive those whose actions have harmed us.

As we come to a greater understanding and appreciation of the depth of God's love and forgiveness our capacity to forgive others increases.

The stanza, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil", is a reference not to any temptation, but to the temptation to deny, or fall from faith when it is being severely tested.

The Lord's Prayer serves as the pattern for all Christian prayer. Its stanzas hold in creative tension:

- God who is in heaven with the image of God as father,
- the need for our daily bread now while working and praying for the kingdom to come,
- the practical response to the experience of divine forgiveness in forgiving those who trespass against us, and finally,
- the hope that in the face of despair and meaninglessness we will remain steadfast in our faith until the end of our life.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

As the Lord's Prayer forms the pattern for all Christian prayer, what theme or stanza is most important to you and why?

### Question 2

What does it mean to you that no sin is beyond forgiveness and that no one is excluded from the invitation from God to experience radical forgiveness?

### Question 3

As you bring this session to prayer, you might want to identify someone who you can talk to about God's offer of forgiveness to you.

## Movie

A film that might help to explore The Lord's Prayer is *The Painted Veil*. Made in 2006, this film was directed by John Curran and stars Naomi Watts.

We are all trespassers. *The Painted Veil* is a story of an unfaithful wife who finds herself in a remote Chinese village facing what she has done. She makes a decision to atone for her sin by helping during an epidemic. Her conversations with the Mother Superior of the convent are full of hope and reveal how repentance and forgiveness might be achieved.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a story from Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta. "I once picked up a woman from a garbage dump and she was burning with fever; she was in her last days and her only lament was: 'My son did this to me.' I begged her: 'You must forgive your son. In a moment of madness, when he was not himself, he did a thing he regrets. Be a mother to him, forgive him'.

It took me a long time to make her say: 'I forgive my son.' Just before she died in my arms, she was able to say that with a real forgiveness. She was not concerned that she was dying. The breaking of the heart was that her son did not want her. This is something you and I can understand."



## Session 22

### Sacred Time, Sacred Space, Sacred Things

Worship in the Catholic Church follows a calendar that is based on a cycle of periods called liturgical seasons. In the midst of these seasons, the Church also sets aside special feast days to celebrate the memory of saints.

Just as we mark our lives by anniversaries, birthdays and national holidays, the Church celebrates the mysteries of Christ's life in a pattern every year.

Each and every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and as such, Sunday is considered to be a major feast day.

Among the other feast days that the Church remembers and celebrates are Christ's conception on the feast of the Annunciation, Christ's birth at Christmas, Christ's death on Good Friday, Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

In the Catholic calendar every day of the year has its own special readings from the Bible. There are readings for the Mass of the day and there are readings for the Prayer of the Church. The Prayer of the Church, also called the Liturgy of the Hours, is a special collection of prayers made up mainly from the Psalms of the Bible. In session 28 of this program we introduce the Liturgy of the Hours as a prayer practice you might wish to learn.

The idea of dividing the year up in different ways is something that most of us can relate to. In the tropical regions, people talk of a dry season and a wet season. In more temperate climates, the labels summer, autumn, winter and spring are used to divide the year. For others, the beginning of football season or the first cricket test match mark the beginning of a timeframe that is important to them.

During the course of each and every year Catholics use a liturgical or worship calendar to bring to mind past events and people. The liturgical calendar assists Catholics in keeping the mystery of faith alive as they look forward to Christ's return in glory at the end of time.

There are four main seasons in the liturgical calendar:

**Advent** which covers the four Sundays before Christmas. In Advent, Catholics prepare to celebrate Christ's birth and anticipate his coming again at the end of time.

**Christmas:** this season celebrates Christ's birth and remembers the visits by both the shepherds and the wise men to the holy family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The Christmas season runs from the 25th of December to the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, on the Sunday after the 6th of January.

**Lent:** this season covers the six weeks of preparation for the celebration of Easter. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and finishes on the evening of Holy Thursday.

**Easter:** the season of Easter is the heart of the liturgical calendar. The Easter season begins with the Easter Triduum, which is celebrated as one liturgical event spread over three days from the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday to the eve of Easter Sunday.

The Easter Vigil on the eve of Easter Sunday is the high-point of the three-day celebration as it celebrates Christ's resurrection from the dead. The celebration of Christ's resurrection continues for 50 days until the feast of Pentecost.

**Ordinary Time:** apart from the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter there are 33 or 34 weeks which are devoted to the mystery of Christ in all its facets but do not highlight any particular aspect. This period of the Church calendar is called Ordinary Time.

### **Sacred Space**

In a very real sense Catholic worship is not tied to any particular space or place. While Christ lived and died in Palestine and we speak of this region as the Holy Land, worship of the risen Lord is in spirit and in truth. For more on this point, see the Gospel of John, chapter 4, verses 20-24.

It is because the Word of God is united to humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, that all of creation is blessed, renewed and made holy.

Christian worship is of equal value, whether it is done in a grand cathedral in Europe, an ancient site in the Holy Land or a small country church in outback Australia.

When we create a space for worship by building a church, chapel or prayer room, we set aside the space as special. From God's point of view the whole of creation is holy. However, we are human and we need to create special places to help us to heighten our awareness of the presence of God.

It is in this context that we can talk of sacred space, that is, space that reminds us of an aspect of God. We may be reminded of the majesty of God through a soaring cathedral or the humanity of Jesus crucified by a humble wooden chapel. God does not need our churches to be God, but we do need our buildings and spaces to help us remember God.

## Sacred Things

Within churches and chapels themselves there are special spaces and items that we set aside as blessed or sacred. What makes these spaces or things holy is what they contain, or the purpose for which they are used.

In the front of each Catholic church there is an area known as the Sanctuary. In this area there is the Altar, the Lectern or book stand, the Pulpit from which the priest preaches and the Tabernacle, a metal container where Jesus Christ is really present in what Catholics refer to as the “Blessed Sacrament”.

The Blessed Sacrament is the body of Christ under the appearance of a small, flat bread host that was consecrated at Mass. For more on this, see the Gospel of John, chapter 6, verses 35-40.

It is Jesus Christ really present in the Tabernacle that makes a Catholic church or chapel a sacred space. As Catholics enter and leave a church they reverence the Tabernacle by genuflecting, which is bending down on one knee, or by bowing.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

Think of a time, place or thing that is sacred to you.

### Question 2

What does it mean to you when you enter a church or chapel?

### Question 3

If you can, spend some time inside a Catholic church in prayer towards the front of the church and think about the extraordinary mystery of the risen Christ really present in the Tabernacle under the form of a consecrated host.

## Movie

A film that might help to explore sacred time, sacred space, sacred things is *The Fourth Wise Man*. Made in 1985, this film was directed by Michael Ray Rhodes and stars Martin Sheen.

The legend behind this film is that there was a fourth wise man that travelled to see Jesus with the other three magi. He wanted to see the Messiah, to find a sacred time and sacred space.



But it did not work out that way. On his journey, he encountered many people who were in need of his help – and he stayed, and he stayed. In fact, he stayed with them so long that as an old man he finally got to Jerusalem as Jesus was being crucified.

But, by being involved with ordinary people in commonsense and practical situations, he had lived out the message of the Gospel without seeing Jesus as he had so wished.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a reading from *The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life* by the Benedictine nun, Sr Joan Chittister OSB.

It is a gentle, tender invitation,  
this call to create within ourselves  
a Monastery of the Heart.  
It is the call to go down deep into the self  
in order to find there the God  
who urges us;  
to come out of ourselves  
to do the work of God,  
to live in union with God  
in the world around us.  
It is not punitive, this call.  
It is not demanding,  
not harsh and unforgiving.  
It is, instead, the daily guarantee  
that, if we will only begin the journey  
and stay the road –  
listening to the voice of God  
and responding to it  
with all our gifts and goodness –  
we will find that God stands waiting  
to sustain us,  
and support us,  
and fulfil us  
at every turn. Amen.



## Session 23

### Sacramentality and Sacraments

Sacraments are God's gift to the Church. They symbolise God acting in the lives of people and they bring about what they symbolise. In this session, we explore the meaning of sacramentality and the sacraments.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

#### Sacramentality

Catholics believe the fullness of God to be present in Jesus Christ. The Son of God, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, was born of the Virgin Mary as a human being in the person of Jesus Christ. This means that God himself, in and through Jesus, is seen, touched, smelled, tasted and heard in the midst of human living. This is what the Church means by the principle of "sacramentality".

In a certain sense anything can act sacramentally, as the whole of creation is a reflection of God. The principle of sacramentality affirms that as we explore the human condition and the natural environment we are in fact discovering more and more about the presence of God. God can also be recognised to be present in our service to others and in our interaction with other people and ideas.

#### Signs and Symbols

Generally, when we think of a sign we think of words or images that give us a direction, an instruction or announce something. A sign is designed to only have one meaning, for example a "STOP" sign gives a clear, unambiguous direction and a "FOR SALE" sign announces to the viewer that the object can be bought.

Symbols can be defined as "an image of a real or imaginary object that evokes a feeling or is evoked by a feeling." Symbols also allow for multiple messages to be present at the same time. Unlike signs, the messages communicated by symbols have the capacity to mean different things to different people and to engage our feelings as well as our minds. Symbols and symbolic action are important in our understanding of the sacraments.

#### Rituals

Rituals are symbolic actions that help us express our beliefs or values. Some examples of simple rituals include a handshake, the sign of the cross and the laying on of hands. It seems

that the practice of performing rituals is part of who we are as humans and evidence of ritual practice has been found reaching back to prehistoric times.

## Sacraments

Sacraments are God's gift to the Church. They both symbolise God acting in the lives of people and they bring about what they symbolise. One way to think about how a symbolic action has a real impact is to think of an embrace between husband and wife or between close friends.

To those looking on, the embrace is a symbol of the closeness of the relationship between the people. For the people themselves, the embrace actually brings them closer together as, through it, they feel more strongly bonded to each other. Sacraments are a little like that. The Catholic Church celebrates seven sacraments. They fit into three categories,

- Sacraments of initiation: **Baptism, Eucharist** and **Confirmation**
- Sacraments of healing: **Reconciliation** and **Anointing of the Sick**
- Sacraments in the service of communion: **Marriage** and **Holy Orders**.

All the sacraments involve people making use of material things acting in symbolic ways. God's grace works in the body, mind and spirit of a person as they participate in sacramental action.

Sacraments have a real effect on the life of those who accept them as gifts from God. In and through sacraments, people are invited to reflect upon the meaning and significance of their relationship with God, with others and with all creation.

Take Baptism for example. When a person is baptised, those observing the symbolic action – of either the person's immersion in water or of water being poured over the person's head – are prompted to think of a wide range of associations that water brings to mind.

Examples include water that cleanses; rain that refreshes dry land; the sea, lakes and rivers teeming with life; floods that destroy; and our fear of drowning.

For the person who is baptised the experience of symbolic drowning and cleansing has an impact on their interior life of feelings and values. Through God's grace bestowed in the sacrament of Baptism, a Christian's life takes on a new meaning and their relationship with God and the Christian community becomes deeper and richer.

Sacraments are gifts from God that invite a response in faith. Through sacramental symbolic action, people express themselves to God. Sacraments nurture our faith by helping us stay connected to both the origins of our religion and to our faith community. Sacraments act as signs along the road in our constant searching for the fullness of God.

Through the seven sacraments, Catholics are reminded that as a member of a Church community they not only receive grace but they also have the responsibility to be grace-filled people for others.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

What are some of the symbols that you can identify around you and what do they mean to you?

### Question 2

What rituals are important in your life?

### Question 3

As you bring this session to prayer think about the things that you see, hear, touch, taste or smell that communicate something of the presence of God to you.

## Movie

A film that might help to explore sacraments and sacramentality is *Babette's Feast*. Made in 1987, this film was directed by Gabriel Axel and stars Stéphane Audran.

*Babette's Feast* is one of the best food movies ever. In 19th century Denmark, a group of righteous Christians are treated to a magnificent meal prepared by their French cook, Babette, who used to manage a Paris restaurant. The film shows the preparation of the feast in mouth-watering detail.

We realise that the food is both real and symbolic. It represents Babette's total love and devotion, paid for through her lottery win, giving it to others. It is also symbolic food for the guests who tend to be cautious about enjoying themselves because of their rigid beliefs. But the feast transforms them, enables them to forgive old grudges and be reconciled. It is sacramental.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a brief reflection by Fr Ron Rolheiser OMI.

To believe in the resurrection is to  
believe that there is not a grave of any kind that can hold you.  
To believe in the resurrection is to  
believe that nothing is impossible for God and,  
thus, impossible for you either –  
even today, even right here and now!



## Session 24

### Eucharist

For Catholics, the celebration of the Mass is the centre of their life of faith. Mass is also called Eucharist, a Greek word which means “to give thanks”. The Eucharist is the heart and soul of the Catholic Church. Without the Eucharist there would not be a Catholic Church.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

The Eucharist has its origins in the Last Supper when Jesus shared the Jewish Passover meal with the apostles on the night before he was crucified.

### Eucharist and Church

The interior of a Catholic church is often used in television shows and movies as a backdrop for scenes. Sometimes the church is shown as a quiet, dimly lit space where people meet. At other times, the confessional is the centre of the scene.

Perhaps one of the reasons that those who make films and television use Catholic churches is the rich range of pictures, statues, candles and stained-glass windows that they contain.

For all the beautiful things that are inside Catholic churches, the main reason that they exist is to provide a space for Catholics to gather with a priest to celebrate the Eucharist.

In chapter 24 of the Gospel of Luke, we find the story of two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The disciples are joined in their journey by a stranger and later stop to share a meal. Some Bible experts see this story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus as a description of an early Christian Eucharist. Let us explore this story.

After Jesus had risen from the dead he appeared beside two of the disciples as they walked towards a village called Emmaus. Although the disciples walked with Jesus, something prevented them from recognising him. On the journey they spoke about the events that had occurred in Jerusalem.

The disciples appeared to be disappointed and confused as they walked with their eyes downcast. Jesus then asked what they were discussing. The disciples were astounded that the stranger did not know what had happened in Jerusalem over the past few days.

Then one of the disciples, whose name was Cleopas, told the stranger about Jesus of Nazareth who they saw to be a mighty prophet in word and deed, before God and all the people. Cleopas

continued to explain how the chief priests and leaders handed Jesus over to be condemned to death and that he had been crucified.

The disciples then told of confusing reports they had heard that the body of Jesus was missing and that some of their group had been told by an angel that Jesus was alive.

As they continued to walk, Jesus then spoke about the writings in the Old Testament, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, explaining the passages in the Scriptures and how they referred to him.

When they drew near to Emmaus, the disciples asked the knowledgeable stranger to stay with them. As they began to share a meal, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and handed it to them. At this, the eyes of the disciples were opened and they recognised him; but he vanished from their sight.

Startled by this extraordinary event, the disciples said to each other: 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'

They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the 11 apostles gathered together with their companions. The apostles were saying that Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to Simon. The two disciples then told their story of what had happened on the road to Emmaus, and how they had recognised Jesus at the breaking of bread.

There are five parallels between the Catholic Mass and the Emmaus story:

1. Christ is always with us, although we may not recognise his presence.
2. It is not unusual to come to prayer perhaps disheartened and confused as to what God might be doing in our life.
3. As Jesus explained the Scriptures, so also in the celebration of the Eucharist the Scriptures are proclaimed in the readings and explained in the homily or sermon.
4. At Mass we recognise Jesus as truly present in the bread, blessed, broken and shared.
5. When the disciples recognised Jesus as the risen Lord, they returned to Jerusalem to tell the others. When we recognise the risen Lord in the celebration of the Eucharist, we are also invited to tell others the Good News that Jesus is risen from the dead.

### **Christ present in the celebration of the Eucharist**

At Mass, Catholics become aware of Christ's presence in five ways:

Firstly, Christ is present in the priest who represents Christ crucified and risen.

Secondly, Christ is present through his Word when the Scriptures are proclaimed.

Thirdly, Christ is especially present at Mass when the priest pronounces the words of consecration and the bread and wine become Christ's Body and Blood.

Fourthly, Christ is present when the community gathers to pray and sing. As he promised in the 18th chapter of Matthew, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Fifthly, Christ is present in a special way when we receive Holy Communion at Mass.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

What stands out for you in the Emmaus story?

### Question 2

List examples of when you have experienced the presence of Jesus.

### Question 3

At the meal Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and handed it to the disciples. At this, their eyes were opened and they recognised him. Think of an event in the last couple of days when through the actions of another you recognised that God was really present with you.

## Movie

A film that might help to explore Eucharist or the Mass is *Pieces of April*.

Made in 2003, this film was directed by Peter Hedges and stars Katie Holmes. In the United States, Thanksgiving and the Thanksgiving dinner are holiday events in which Americans appreciate their blessings no matter how hard life can be. Many films show this holiday. In *Pieces of April*, a young woman is surviving in New York and decides to prepare a dinner for her parents with whom she has some difficulties.

When things go wrong, she is helped by her multi-ethnic neighbours. She is able to find some reconciliation with her parents. In this meal, this 'breaking of bread' for April, she is able to discover the real meaning of life, values and reconciliation.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a reading from Ezekiel, chapter 34, verses 15 and 16:

I myself shall pasture my sheep, I myself shall give them rest declares the Lord. I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the injured and make the sick strong. I shall watch over the fat and healthy. I shall be a true shepherd to them.



## Session 25

### Mary, the Mother of the Lord

The popular prayer *The Hail Mary* provides a framework to begin our reflections on Mary and her relationship to Jesus and to us. In this prayer, we have a combination of direct quotes from Scripture and stanzas that illustrate how thinking about Mary developed in the life of the Church.

A characteristic of Catholic spirituality is devotion to Mary, the Mother of God. In view of her unique role in bringing Jesus Christ to birth, Mary has a special place in the life of the Catholic Church. Many churches and cathedrals around the world are named after one of the many titles attributed to Mary.

In the Middle Ages, the age of chivalry, the term Our Lady was given to Mary, and it is from this title that we get the French translation of Notre Dame, which names the famous cathedral in Paris and universities in the United States and Australia.

Many Catholic homes have statues and pictures of Mary. Medals which depict images of Mary are very popular and of course there are Rosary beads.

In the next session we will examine the history of the Rosary in some detail. In this session, we honour Mary as the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God, the Mother of the Church and first disciple of Jesus.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

We begin our reflection on the Hail Mary with the prayer itself. This is followed by an examination of each stanza in turn:

Hail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with you.  
Blessed are you among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.



## **Stanza one**

**Hail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with you.**

This stanza is taken from the first chapter of Luke's Gospel, verses 26-28, where the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that even though she is a virgin, she is to conceive a child and she is to name him Jesus.

In the New Jerusalem Bible, this passage reads: In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.'

In earlier translations of the Gospel, the words attributed to the angel are 'Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you'. Mary is the one who enjoys God's favour, Mary full of God's grace.

Luke then provides an account of a conversation between Mary and the angel as the angel makes clear to Mary what God is asking of her, and in verse 38 the most important 'yes' in human history is recorded, as Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.'

## **Stanza two**

**Blessed are you among women,  
And blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.**

This stanza also comes directly from chapter one of Luke's Gospel, when Mary visits her pregnant cousin, Elizabeth. We begin at verse 39:

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now it happened that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.'

## **Stanza three**

**Holy Mary, Mother of God**

For some people the title for Mary, Mother of God is a problem as it appears to make Mary either equal to God or even above God. Mother of God is a translation of a Greek word "Theotokos". The word Theotokos is a technical word that means "God bearer" or the one who bears God. The term first came to be used at a Council of church leaders held in Ephesus in 431.

The Council was called because there were some people who were denying the unity of Christ's human and divine natures.

In saying that Mary is the mother or bearer of God, the Council affirmed that Jesus was God from the moment of his conception. The title for Mary, Mother of God is much more about Jesus, the child she bore, than it is about Mary herself.

### **Stanza four**

**Pray for us sinners,**

**now and at the hour of our death.**

A belief that has been held in the Church from very earliest times is that because Mary had been the mother of Jesus, when she came to the end of her earthly life, it was not proper that her body be allowed to decay.

As such it is firmly believed by the Church that Mary is the first to enjoy the fruits of the general resurrection in the pattern of the resurrection and ascension of her son Jesus.

In other words, God has taken Mary to heaven, body and soul. As one in heaven who is like us in our humanity and close to God, in that he chose her for a special task, the Church teaches that Mary can and does pray or intercede with God on our behalf. In everyday language we might say that in Mary we have a friend in a high place and that her prayer can assist us in life and particularly as we prepare for death.

### **Questions**

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

#### **Question 1**

Where do you see the power of God at work in your world?

#### **Question 2**

List the occasions when you have recognised the power of God in your life, when you have overcome fear and grown closer to God and to other people.

#### **Question 3**

What support can Mary offer you in your journey of faith in God?

### **Movie**

A film that might help to explore the life and times of Mary is *Mary, Mother of Jesus*. Made in 1999, this film was directed by Kevin Connor and stars Christian Bale.

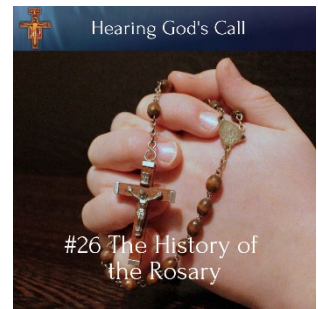
In films, Mary is usually presented in her scenes with her son Jesus. For the millennium, American television made *Mary, Mother of Jesus*, as a contribution to thinking about the impact of Christianity.

The film offers an opportunity to see the episodes in Mary's life, not just the annunciation, visitation to Elizabeth and the birth of Jesus, but Mary's later life and her own following of her son, even to Calvary.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with the *Magnificat*, the song of Mary from the Gospel of Luke, chapter one, verses 46-55. This prayer is said every evening by those around the world who pray the Prayer of the Church. We are to introduce the Prayer of the Church in session 28 of this program.

My soul glorifies the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour.  
He looks on his servant in her lowliness  
henceforth all ages will call me blessed.  
The Almighty works marvels for me,  
Holy is his name.  
His mercy is from age to age,  
on those who fear him.  
He puts forth his arm in strength  
and scatters the proud-hearted.  
He casts the mighty from their thrones  
and raises the lowly.  
He fills the starving with good things  
sends the rich away empty.  
He protects Israel, his servant,  
remembering his mercy,  
the mercy promised to our fathers,  
to Abraham and his sons forever. Amen.



## Session 26

### The History of the Rosary

The Rosary is an ancient Christian prayer form in which a string of beads is used to help the person praying. It is grounded in the mystery of Christ and brings to mind episodes from his life, his suffering, his death and his Resurrection.

#### Teaching (based on the podcast)

The origin of the Rosary is not clear. The use of "prayer beads" and the repeated saying of prayers to aid in meditation stem from the earliest days of the Church. There is some evidence that in the Middle Ages strings of beads were used to count Our Fathers and Hail Marys. The spread of the Rosary using the Hail Mary is attributed to the preaching of St Dominic in the 13th century.

To reflect on the mystery of Christ, 50 Hail Marys are recited in a soft voice. The 50 Hail Marys are broken up into five groups of 10, called decades. Other prayers mark the beginning and the end of each decade. In the next session we provide instructions on how you can say the Rosary, either by yourself or with others.

As a prayer form, the Rosary can be likened to Zen meditation in leading to a deep state of peace. Saying the Rosary is open to everyone and once the prayers are learnt, that is all you need to begin, there are no complicated or difficult meditation techniques. Saying the Rosary is something everyone can do. It is truly a gift from God to his people.

#### **The Rosary, the mystery of Christ and prayers for different days of the week.**

On different days of the week different episodes from the mystery of Christ form the background for reflection while the Hail Marys are being recited.

There are 20 stories or mysteries in total, and they are divided into four groups called the Joyful Mysteries, the Mysteries of Light, the Sorrowful Mysteries and the Glorious Mysteries. Each story or mystery is associated with a decade of the Rosary.

**The Joyful Mysteries** are reflected upon on Mondays and Saturdays.

The episodes in the Joyful Mysteries are taken from the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke.

The first joyful mystery is *The Annunciation* when the angel announced to Mary that she was to be the mother of Jesus. See Luke, chapter 1, verses 26-38.

The second joyful mystery is *The Visitation* when the pregnant Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth. See Luke, chapter 1, verses 39-45.

The third joyful mystery is *The Birth of Jesus*. See Luke, chapter 2, verses 1-20.

The fourth joyful mystery is *The Presentation of Jesus*. See Luke, chapter 2, verses 22-38.

The fifth joyful mystery is *The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple*. See Luke, chapter 2, verses 41-50.

**The Mysteries of Light** are reflected upon on Thursdays.

The first of the mysteries of light is *Christ's Baptism in the Jordan*. See Mark, chapter 1, verses 9-11.

The second of the mysteries of light is *Christ's self-revelation at the marriage at Cana* where Jesus turned water into wine. See John, chapter 2, verses 1-12.

The third of the mysteries of light is *Christ's proclamation of the Kingdom of God with his call to conversion*. See Luke, chapter 4, verses 16-22.

The fourth of the mysteries of light is *Christ's Transfiguration*. See Matthew, chapter 17, verses 1-8.

The fifth of the mysteries of light is *Christ's Institution of the Eucharist*. See Luke, chapter 22, verses 19-20.

**The Sorrowful Mysteries** are reflected upon on Tuesdays and Fridays.

The first sorrowful mystery is *The Agony in the Garden*. See Luke, chapter 22, verses 35-46.

The second sorrowful mystery is the *Scourging at the Pillar* when Jesus was whipped. See John, chapter 19, verse 1.

The third sorrowful mystery is the *Crowning with Thorns*. See Matthew, chapter 27, verses 27-31.

The fourth sorrowful mystery is the *Carrying of the Cross*. See John, chapter 19, verse 17.

The fifth sorrowful mystery is *The Crucifixion*. See John, chapter 19, verses 18-37.

**The Glorious Mysteries** are reflected upon on Wednesdays and Sundays.

The first of the glorious mysteries is *The Resurrection*. See Mark, chapter 16, verses 1-8.

The second of the glorious mysteries is *The Ascension*. See Luke, chapter 24, verses 50-53.

The third of the glorious mysteries is *The descent of the Holy Spirit*, the Pentecost event. See Acts, chapter 2, verses 1-13.

The fourth of the glorious mysteries is the *Assumption of Mary*. This article of faith is a direct consequence of the fact that Jesus is the Son of God and that Mary gave birth to Jesus.

The fifth of the glorious mysteries is the *Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven*. This article of faith honours the Mother of Jesus as the first among all of the saints of God.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

If you have not already got a set of Rosary beads, spend a little time working out who you might ask with regard to obtaining a set for your prayer.

### Question 2

Saying the Rosary every day can transform your life. As the saying goes 'It won't happen overnight, but it will happen'. Think about a time each day that you might set aside to pray the Rosary.

### Question 3

Begin praying by saying 10 Hail Marys. If you do not have beads use your fingers to keep count.

## Movie

A film that might help to explore the Rosary is *The Miracle Maker*. Made in 2000, this film was directed by Derek W. Hayes and stars Ralph Fiennes.

When the Rosary became a popular prayer, there were paintings and stained-glass windows in the cathedrals and churches to help people know what they were praying about. Nowadays, we also have Jesus films which bring the mysteries to life.

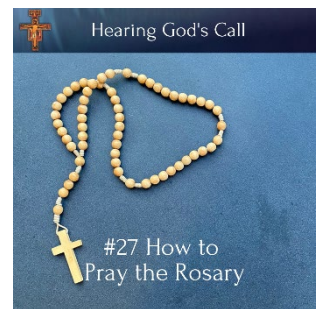
A gentle and simple way of bringing some of these mysteries to people who pray the Rosary is looking at the animation film, *The Miracle Maker*. For the Joyful Mysteries, there are two-dimensional sketches of Mary's experience with Jesus, annunciation, birth, the loss of Jesus in the Temple.

For the Sorrowful Mysteries there are scenes of the Passion and Crucifixion that have been designed for younger audiences but which we can all appreciate.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with one of prayers of the Rosary, the *Glory Be*.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.  
As it was in the beginning,  
is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.



## Session 27

### How to Pray the Rosary

This practical session is designed to teach you the Rosary, and as such is mainly made up of prayers and instructions, including the recommendation of a film that may assist in appreciating the Rosary.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

#### Praying the Rosary

The Rosary begins with the sign of the cross. This ancient, prayerful action is made with the right hand moving from forehead to breast and then from left to right shoulder, while reciting the following words:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The next action is to pray the “Apostles’ Creed” while holding the crucifix at the end of the Rosary beads:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended into hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting. Amen.

Then on the straight piece of the beads attached to the crucifix, on the first bead say the Our Father:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

On the next three beads say three Hail Marys:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.  
Blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, Mother of God pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

The introductory prayers are completed on the next bead by a Glory Be:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning,  
is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Staying on the same bead you announce the name of the first mystery and then say the Our Father.

You might remember from the previous session that Joyful Mysteries are remembered on Mondays and Saturdays, the Mysteries of Light on Thursdays, the Sorrowful Mysteries on Tuesdays and Fridays and the Glorious Mysteries on Wednesdays and Sundays.

So, for example, if it was a Monday, the first Joyful Mystery announced would be the Annunciation.

Following the Our Father which begins each decade, a Hail Mary is said on each of the beads while meditating on the Mystery. There are 10 beads and so 10 Hail Marys.

The decade then concludes with a Glory Be on the bead between the decades.

Staying on this bead the new decade is begun through announcing the second mystery, in this case, the Visitation, and an Our Father is said. As in the previous decade, a Hail Mary is said for each of the 10 beads.

Finally, we work through each of the five mysteries in the group of mysteries for the day, praying, in turn, the Lord's Prayer, the 10 Hail Marys and the Glory Be.

At the end of a set of five mysteries of the Rosary, we usually conclude with the Hail, Holy Queen:



Hail, holy Queen, mother of mercy.  
Hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope.  
To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve.  
To you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.  
Turn then, most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy towards us,  
and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.  
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

### **Praying the Rosary together**

The Rosary is a perfect prayer to say with another person or with a group of people. When two or more people are saying the Rosary together the two people or two groups of people alternate when they change decade in saying the first and second half of each of the prayers.

For example, with the Hail Mary, one person or group begins. The other person or group then finishes the prayer.

With the Hail Mary the first person or group prays:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou  
among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

And the second person or group then responds:

Holy Mary, Mother of God pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

With the Our Father the first person or group prays:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy  
kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And the second person or group then responds:

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

For the Glory Be the first person or group prays:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

And the second person or group then responds:

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without  
end. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed and the Hail Holy Queen are said together.

## Questions

For the reflection exercise for this session, you are encouraged to say one decade of the Rosary, simply beginning with an Our Father and 10 Hail Marys, finishing with a Glory Be. In your own time you can build up to five decades with all of the prayers that make up the Rosary.

## Movie

A film that might help in appreciating the Rosary is *Jesus*. Made in 1999, this film was directed by Roger Young and stars Jeremy Sisto.

Praying the Rosary and the mysteries means contemplating events in Jesus' life and putting ourselves into these scenes. The Rosary can be a prayer of imagination as we recite the prayers.

One of the most powerful of the Sorrowful Mysteries is the Agony in the Garden. The *Jesus* film visualises this for us, like the agony song in *Jesus Christ Superstar* as Jesus sings as he climbs a mountain. A striking visual presentation of the agony can be found in the *Jesus* film. As Jesus prays, Satan returns after testing Jesus in the temptations in the desert. He argues with Jesus, telling him his suffering is worth nothing. He shows him scenes from Christian history to prove it and that he should not go through with his passion. The Agony in the Garden is a real testing of Jesus' willingness to suffer and die.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a simple sign of the cross:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



## Session 28

### The Prayer of the Church

The Prayer of the Church is also called the Liturgy of the Hours or the Divine Office. It is the prayer of the whole People of God. It is a form of official liturgy or public prayer of the Catholic Church, but you do not have to be a priest, brother or nun to pray it.

From ancient times the Church has had the custom of celebrating and marking different hours of the day with prayers. In this way the Church fulfils the Lord's instruction to pray without ceasing.

When we pray the Liturgy of the Hours, either alone or with others, we join with a host of others around the world who are praying the same prayers.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

In session 22 of this program, we explored the meaning and significance of the different seasons in the Church year. We examined Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter and the special feast days that are celebrated throughout the year.

These seasons and events divide the year into special times and ordinary times.

With the Liturgy of the Hours, each day is divided into special times and ordinary times with the special times marked off through formal prayer. In praying the Liturgy of the Hours, time takes on a new meaning and the tempo of prayer at regular times provides a structure and rhythm to each day.

### The history of this ancient prayer form

The Liturgy of the Hours is inspired by God's command to the Hebrew priests of the Old Testament to offer a morning and evening sacrifice. See Exodus, chapter 29, verses 38-39.

During the Babylonian exile, which occurred from 587 to 521 BC, many Jewish people were taken from their homeland to Babylon. They were also taken far away from their regular place of worship, the Temple. In response to this situation, Synagogue services of Bible readings, psalms and hymns developed as a substitute for the worship sacrifices that had been previously done at the Temple.

After the Jewish people returned from exile to Judea the Temple was rebuilt and the prayer services that had been developed in Babylon were brought into Temple prayers. In addition to

Morning and Evening Prayer to accompany the sacrifices made by the priests, prayers at the third, sixth and ninth hours of the day were added.

In the very early Church the Christians celebrated the Eucharist, breaking bread, instead of going to the Temple to participate in the blood sacrifices offered by the priests. However, the apostles continued to pray at the Temple with others during the day. For an example, see Acts of the Apostles, chapter 3, verse 1.

## **Liturgy of the Hours and the Church**

Reading the Word of God at regular times during the day helps the person praying to prepare for silent prayer. The worship “in Spirit and in truth” of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ is not tied to any one place. The whole earth is sacred. When the faithful pray liturgical prayer, even though they may be by themselves, they are the “living stones of the Church”.

The main prayer times during the day are Morning Prayer at sunrise, Evening Prayer as the sun sets and Night Prayer, just before going to sleep. Monks and nuns in monasteries and some other people also pray at other times during the night and day.

The Liturgy of the Hours can take some time to learn, as it has a cycle of four different weeks and there are often special prayers for feast days. The Prayer of the Church or Liturgy of the Hours is a form of liturgical prayer that does not suit everyone.

For those who have some time on their hands, it may be worth exploring, as it not only brings us closer to God through prayer, but the structure of a regular prayer practice can really assist those who experience that their life is a little out of control.

## **Questions**

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button following each statement and instruction to spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### **Question 1**

Think about the things or events that usually divide your day into different segments. Are there special times in your day and are there times that are ordinary? You might want to think about ways to mark out the special times.

Saying a prayer to ask God to bless you and your food before you eat a meal is one way of marking this event as special.

### **Question 2**

Saying formal prayers on a regular basis can change the rhythm of your day and have an effect on how you relate to others and how they relate to you.

Think about ways that you might be able to set some time aside at different times of the day to pray.

### Question 3

If you are interested in participating in the Liturgy of the Hours by praying the prayers by yourself, think about who you might be able to ask to help you to learn how to pray this ancient prayer form.

### Movie

A film that might help to explore the Prayer of the Church is *Lourdes*. Made in 2009, this film was directed by Jessica Hausner and stars Sylvie Testud.

People pray in many different ways: they go to Church, they pray privately, they may say the Rosary or other vocal prayers, they might take quiet time to meditate and reflect. We can see praying in different ways when they go on pilgrimage and pray together.

*Lourdes* is a film about pilgrimage to the well-known shrine. Some of the pilgrims are devout and pray fervently. Others are just average in their prayer. And there are some who have faith but can be a bit sceptical about the miracles. But *Lourdes* does witness to the way people can pray.

### Prayer

We conclude this session by reading Psalm 121 which is part of Evening Prayer, Week 4, Sunday:

I rejoiced when I heard them say,  
'Let us go to God's house!'  
And now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.  
Jerusalem is built as a city  
Strongly compact!  
It is there that the tribes go up,  
The tribes of the Lord.  
For Israel's law it is  
there to praise the Lord's name.  
There were set the thrones of judgement  
of the house of David.  
For the peace of Jerusalem pray,  
'Peace be to your homes!  
May peace reign in your walls!  
In your palaces peace!'  
For the love of my brethren and friends

I say 'Peace upon you'.  
For love of the house of the Lord,  
I will ask for your good.



## Session 29

### The Church in the Modern World: Catholic Social Teaching

The mission that Jesus gave to the Catholic Church is to make disciples of all nations; to “ baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands he gave.” See Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 28, verses 19-20. One of the challenges that the Church faces is identifying practical implications that arise from the teachings of Jesus.

#### Teaching (based on the podcast)

Over 120 years ago, Pope Leo XIII wrote a document on the relationship of capital and labour. Since then, Popes and Bishops reflecting upon social questions have regularly added to a body of work that has become known as Catholic Social Teaching.

In this session we explore 10 principles or main themes that have been identified in this growing body of teaching. Information for this session is drawn from the work of an American Jesuit priest named William Byron who has been writing and teaching on this subject for many years.

Fr Byron lists 10 principles of Catholic Social Teaching:

1. The Principle of Human Dignity.
2. The Principle of Respect for Human Life.
3. The Principle of Association.
4. The Principle of Participation.
5. The Principle of Preferential Protection for the Poor and Vulnerable.
6. The Principle of Solidarity.
7. The Principle of Stewardship.
8. The Principle of Subsidiarity.
9. The Principle of Human Equality.
10. The Principle of the Common Good.

We briefly address each principle in turn.

## **1. The Principle of Human Dignity.**

According to this principle, it is not what you do or what you have that gives you a claim on respect; it is simply *being* human that establishes your dignity. Every person is worthy of being treated with respect – regardless of race, age, sex, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, employment or economic status, health, intelligence, achievement or any other differentiating characteristic.

## **2. The Principle of Respect for Human Life.**

According to this principle, human life at every stage of development and decline is precious and therefore worthy of protection and respect. It is always wrong to directly attack innocent human life. For Catholics, the sacredness of human life is part of any moral vision for a just and good society.

## **3. The Principle of Association.**

The basis of human society is the family. It is for this reason that family stability should always be protected and promoted. Human dignity is protected, growth fostered and the common good promoted through individuals associating in families and in other social institutions.

## **4. The Principle of Participation.**

Every human person has a right to participate in education and meaningful work and to enjoy the fruits of their labour through access to sufficient food and adequate shelter in an environment of peace and security.

## **5. The Principle of Preferential Protection for the Poor and Vulnerable.**

If the good of all is to prevail, preferential protection must be given to those who are powerless and poor. Ensuring that those who are poor and vulnerable are given preferential treatment helps maintain a healthy society.

## **6. The Principle of Solidarity.**

In a Catholic understanding of things, we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. As one human family living in a world that is increasingly interdependent, learning to love our neighbour has a global dimension.

## **7. The Principle of Stewardship.**

The steward is a manager, not an owner. In an era of growing awareness about our physical environment, the Catholic tradition calls on all people to recognise a sense of moral responsibility for the protection of the environment, specifically of farms, forests, wetlands, the sea and lakes, of air, water, soil, and of minerals, oil and other natural deposits. The responsibilities of stewardship also look toward our use of our personal talents with a view to paying attention to our personal health and our use of personal property.



## 8. The Principle of Subsidiarity.

The Principle of Subsidiarity states that no higher level of organisation should perform any function that can be handled efficiently and effectively at a lower level of organisation by human persons who are closer to the problem or issue. This principle can be applied in a wide variety of settings, but its application is most pressing in relation to the exercise of government.

## 9. The Principle of Human Equality.

One of the earliest ethical stirrings felt in the developing human person is a sense of what is “fair” and what is “unfair”. The simple human principle of fairness underlies the notion of what we mean by human equality. One definition of justice is treating equals equally or rendering to each person his or her due.

## 10. The Principle of the Common Good.

The Common Good is understood as the social conditions that allow people to reach their full human potential and to realise their human dignity. A sense of community is developed and enhanced when groups, neighbours, regions and nations make decisions informed by a scale of values that balances the needs of individuals with the needs of the community and society more broadly.

## Questions

We now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

The bedrock of Catholic Social Teaching is the dignity of the human person. What does this statement mean to you? Every person is worthy of being treated with respect.

### Question 2

While the basis of human society is the family, many people’s experiences of family is less than ideal. What can you do to enrich your family life?

### Question 3

As you bring this session to prayer, think of the things that you do that show your respect for the dignity of those you deal with on a regular basis. Ask God to assist you in developing new ways to show respect to them.

## Movie

Two films that might help to explore the issue of the Church in the modern world: Catholic Social Teaching are *On the Waterfront* and *Dead Man Walking*. Made in 1954, *On the*

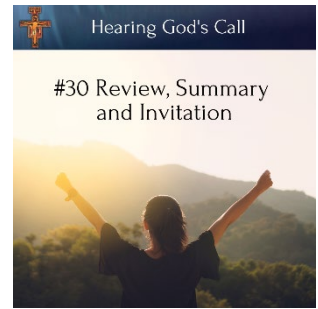
*Waterfront* was directed by Elia Kazan and stars Marlon Brando. *Dead Man Walking* was made in 1995, stars Susan Sarandon and was directed by Tim Robbins.

One of the best scenes which combines Catholic Social Teaching with the experiences and suffering of Jesus comes from the 1954 Oscar winner, *On the Waterfront*. It is a powerful sermon from the port chaplain, a no-holds barred criticism of the exploiting bosses, a support for the men and their families, a focus on Christ crucified. Social justice is for women and men, so the scenes in *Dead Man Walking* between Sister Helen Prejean and the prisoner to be executed, her support for him and her prayer with him enabling him to confess are a reminder the Church should be present even in the grief of a man who is paying for his crimes.

## Prayer

We conclude this session with a prayer:

Dear God,  
Help me, I am lost!  
The road ahead is unclear.  
I know I am moving,  
but I am unsure that it is in the right direction.  
I trust that while I think I am lost  
You are in fact guiding me.  
I am confident that you will never leave me.  
And my faith in you gives me the strength to  
deal with whatever lies ahead of me.  
Thank you God for your belief in me. Amen.



## Session 30

### Review, Summary and Invitation

Congratulations on reaching the final session of *Hearing God's Call*. In this session we look back over the whole program as a reminder of the journey you have been on as you have listened, perhaps written or drawn responses to the questions and maybe viewed some of the films that were recommended.

### Teaching (based on the podcast)

You were introduced to stories of call or invitation as characters from the Old Testament took up challenges and responded in actions and in prayers of joy and sometimes prayers of sorrow. Next you heard the stories of the prophets and their passionate calls to return to covenant fidelity and their close, personal relationships with God.

This was followed by the story of the call of Mary, the mother of Jesus and her extraordinary courage to say yes to God's call. Although Mary's response to God's invitation was individual and personal, she was supported and accompanied in her decision by her companion Joseph, who, despite experiencing confusion, stepped out in faith.

The next figures introduced were the apostles Peter and Paul. Peter, the simple fisherman, was thrust into leadership, despite feeling inadequate. The passionate scholar Paul had his story of transformation, disorientation and blindness leading to new direction as an energetic and clear-sighted teacher and preacher giving witness to Jesus Christ.

Models of faith from the history of the Church were then introduced with stories of saints and heroes and their response to God's particular call to them. In these sessions you were also encouraged to think about God's call to you.

In sessions nine to 11 the focus shifted with teaching and instruction on God's gift to his people in the Bible. It is the story of Jesus Christ that gives shape and purpose to the Bible and with a particular emphasis on forgiveness, it was the actions and message of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels that formed the basis of the next three sessions.

The mission of Jesus continues in and through the Church and its teaching and in sessions 15 to 21 you were introduced to the history of the Church and some important teachings were explored, including the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed.

Three ideas of sacred time, sacred space and sacred things formed the framework for sessions 22 to 28 as the rich themes of sacraments and prayer were explored, including some practical suggestions to assist you in the vital and enriching practice of prayer.

As you remember from the previous session, we concluded the program with a brief exploration of some of the social implications of living in accordance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Questions

As we have done with each of the sessions, we now set aside some time for personal reflection. You might want to press the pause button and spend some time either writing or drawing your response to each of the three questions.

### Question 1

As you come to the end of this audio program, take some time to recall the sessions that meant something special to you and the reasons why they were special.

### Question 2

For some of you, listening to this program may have been an interesting journey, you may be happy that you took it, but you are happy enough that it is finished. For others, you might want to start to listen all over again or perhaps go back to one or two sessions that you really liked.

For others, you are just going to enjoy the whole range of films that have been suggested.

If, however, the program has increased your interest in Jesus Christ and his Church and you would like to find out more about the Catholic faith, the next step is get a copy of a book that is specifically written to build on this audio program.

The book is called *Call and Response: An Introduction to the Catholic Faith*. It is written in simple language, covers a range of topics and picks up where this program finishes. From 2023, this book is available for purchase from the online shop: [www.shop.catholic.au](http://www.shop.catholic.au).

Free resources for enquirers can be obtained via this website:

[www.becoming.catholic.au/s/request-a-book](http://www.becoming.catholic.au/s/request-a-book).

### Question 3

As you bring this session to prayer, and in fact your experience of the whole program, you might want to sit, stand or kneel before God and ask for his assistance in identifying someone who you can talk to about finding out more about the Catholic faith. It may be a priest, chaplain or religious sister or brother. If you need some help in finding a suitable person, contact the Catholic Enquiry Centre. The contact details again are:

Phone: 1300 432 484

Email: [info@catholicenquiry.com](mailto:info@catholicenquiry.com)

## Movie

A film that might help you to review the topics covered in this audio program is *The Saint of Fort Washington*. Made in 1993, this film was directed by Tim Hunter and stars Danny Glover.

It is something of a tall order to find a film that can summarise our reflections on *Hearing God's Call*. One popular story of an ordinary man who has to take a look at his life and his values and respond to a call to change is *The Saint of Fort Washington*.

It shows a kind of 'secular' saint, a young man with mental difficulties who spends time on the streets and in shelters with the range of people in similar situations. But he is a good man who lives a life of values, prepared to lay down his life for others.

## Prayer

We conclude this session and indeed the whole program with a short reflection:

It has been our sincerest hope at the Catholic Enquiry Centre that through these audio presentations you have learnt new things about God, the Church and about yourself and that these new things are an emerging source of life for you.

May God bless you, Father, Son and Spirit, as you continue your journey through life.  
Amen.