

STARTING FROM SCRATCH



... for adults who want to follow Jesus

Compiled by
Bishop David Chislett SSC,
Rector of All Saints' Wickham Terrace, Brisbane
from 1995 to 2005

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

A SERIES OF STUDIES FOR ADULTS WHO WANT TO FOLLOW JESUS

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First produced in this form in 1994

FOREWORD

**by the Right Reverend John Hazlewood SSC, M.A.,
Bishop of Ballarat from 1975 to 1993**

Nobody does start from scratch in any form of learning. We are bogged down by prejudices, often undigested experiences, wrong information or preconceptions, all of which are going to colour the way we understand anything. This is particularly true where religious matters are under consideration.

This excellent teaching aid boldly sets out the Anglican way of understanding the Catholic Faith as Anglicanism has inherited it.

The book is most agreeably set out with a good use of pictures, cartoons, diagrams and quotations from the really great teachers.

The course opens with the fundamental question about God, “Is there anybody there?”

Throughout it emphasises the Christian’s dedication not only to God but to the outcast, the poor, the victims and the unloved. It also emphasises our obligations to the created order itself. This section is “green” but not “greenie.”

“Starting From Scratch” demonstrates the essentially social nature of being a churchman. It reminded me of Paul Bradshaw’s words in his The Identity of Anglican Worship: “Whenever we pray, we do so as a member of the Body of Christ and united in the Spirit with the whole company of earth and heaven.” (p.70)

Some particularly true and realistic attitudes are faced . . . “The people you see in church” on page 46; a most enlightening treatment of the Ten Commandments on page 42; the Eucharist is very properly highlighted with the almost magical quotation from Nicholas Cabasilas on page 33.

There is particular, practical and sensitive advice on what is called “the Spiritual Life” - that is, prayer in all its aspects. The section under the title “Struggle” on page 26 is excellent. The life lived in the Spirit is superbly illustrated with the mighty experience of the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe.

At the very beginning of the course, Father David provides a clear and very well developed series of concepts about Science and Revelation. So many of our secondary educated children find that their religious lives have not been able to get past the superstition that science has all the answers.

I devoutly wish that I had such a manual as this for the teaching of young adults. I heartily recommend its use in these days when it is so easy to forget our Christian heritage.

Such lostness does not lead to either happiness or salvation.

“I found the *Starting from Scratch* studies enjoyable and valuable, as they allowed me to systematically reflect on areas of my faith. They gave me information to aid in explaining my beliefs to others, and ideas that I can continue to explore as I grow spiritually.”

- *Samantha Crosby, university student*

“I found the *Starting from Scratch* evenings most interesting and informative. They explained the day to day worship of the Church in a way that is easily grasped. I would like to thank Father David for his enlightened presentation. If there is a re-run of the series I will certainly do it again and encourage others to come as well.

- *Keith Crosbie, churchwarden*

“These studies aim to improve our knowledge of God, our faith, and the Church. Don’t let this opportunity pass”.

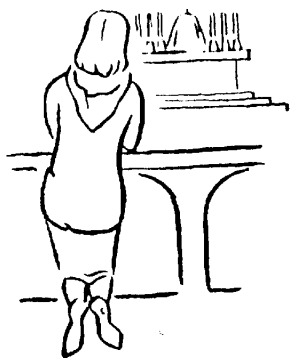
- *June Ray, parishioner*

"I have been going to church for about eight months now. My local priest ran his *Starting from Scratch* course. After doing these studies I felt as though I had been "kick-started".

- *David Stevenson, newly confirmed parishioner*

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Believing in God

THE EMPTINESS WITHIN

There is a longing in the heart of every man, woman and child - a longing for God. Sometimes we try to suppress this longing. Often we ignore it. We even pretend it isn't there. Some people take a lifetime to discover what this ancient longing really is.

Saint Augustine, the fourth century Bishop of Hippo, said in his famous prayer:

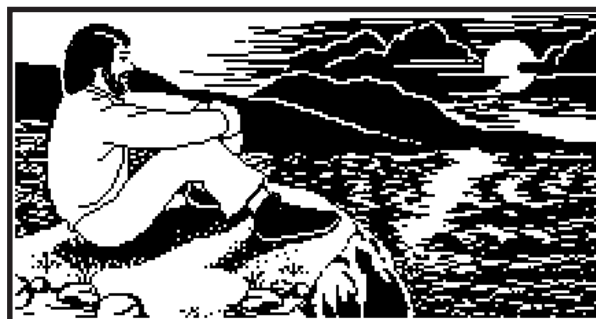
*"You have made us for Yourself,
and our heart is restless
until it finds its rest in You."*

Another way of saying the same thing is to speak of a "God-shaped gap" at the centre of our lives. Each of us knows the reality of that gap, that sense of having a meaningless vacuum at the heart of our being. Human history is the record of our vain search for something that will fill it up. Lots of people compensate for the lack of spiritual reality in their lives by making gods for themselves out of things that can never take the place of God. This works for a while. But sooner or later that sense of emptiness returns. Only God can fill a God-shaped gap.

In our age, science has done its bit to try and take our minds off the real problem. F.J. Sheed writes:

"An unhappy generation has of necessity to distract itself from its own emptiness. Since the beginning of the world, people have found distraction in sin; our own world has found a further distraction, special to itself, in science . . . It is incredible how long science has succeeded in keeping men's minds off their fundamental unhappiness. One marvel follows another . . . electric lights, motor cars, telephones, radio, air travel, television. It is a curious list and very pathetic. The soul of the man is crying for hope or purpose or meaning, and the scientist says, "Here is a telephone," or "Look, television!" - exactly as one tries to distract a baby crying for its mother by offering it sugar sticks or making funny faces at it."

Without a spirituality, a relationship with God, we might exist, but we don't really LIVE. We are WALKING DEAD PEOPLE. We may be physically, emotionally and mentally



"God . . . has put eternity into man's mind."
(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

alive, and even strong, popular and brilliant, but SPIRITUALLY we are DEAD.

When we realise that this is the human condition, an awful sense of emptiness haunts our souls. Our minds become clouded and our emotions jaded - nothing can satisfy us.

We are then forced to re-examine our lives, and ask some searching questions about God, the world, and our priorities.

Professor Sheldon Vanauken, describing this stage in his life, says " . . . I had seen through the pretences of Christianity in my teens, and forthwith abandoned it. How could any intelligent person actually believe that an obscure crucified Jew was God!

"What was so odd was that quite a lot of people, not just sheep but highly intelligent people, did apparently believe it. T.S. Eliot, for instance. Or Eddington - in fact quite a few physicists, the very last people one would expect to be taken in by it. Philosophers, too.

"Was it possible - was there any chance - that there was more to it than I had thought? No, certainly not! Still, it was odd. And it wasn't just a matter of keeping their childhood faith without examination, either. Some of them - intelligent people, too - were actually converts from atheism or agnosticism.

"Could there be something more to it? Something I had missed? After all, I was pretty young when I had rejected Christianity. Oh, but there can't be! Everybody knows what Christianity is. But then, those converts?

"Maybe I ought to have another look at it. Some day. Just to be - well, intellectually honest.

***"Many a morning, after sitting all night in taverns,
I went to early Mass at S. Joseph's Church on Sixth Avenue.
It was just around the corner from where I lived,
and seeing people going to an early weekday Mass attracted me.
What were they finding there?
I longed for their faith.
My own life was sordid
and yet I had occasional glimpses of the true and the beautiful.
So I used to go and kneel in the back pew of S. Joseph's."***

Dorothy Day (1896 - 1980), influential American worker among the poor describing a critical point in her faith journey.

Not that it could possibly be true of course. Still, fair play. Hear both sides. Yes, I'll do it. Some day."

Vanauken's book "A Severe Mercy" tells how at Oxford University in the years following World War II he and his wife meticulously picked their way through intellectual doubt towards belief.

The refreshing thing about their story is the brutal honesty with which they examined the integrity of their position, and the objectivity with which they sifted through the central claims of the Christian faith.

Sooner or later, each of us must face the challenge to do the same.

BELIEF IS NOT IRRATIONAL

Most people have thought it more logical and rational to believe in a god or gods than to restrict their notion of reality to the material world. The arguments advanced for this belief include:

The Argument from Design

The beauty of nature and the complexity of the universe move us to believe that there is an intelligent design and a conscious purpose behind everything.

"Whether we think of earth or sky, the magnitude of the star-strewn deeps of space or the mysteries of the smallest cells of life, the infinite variety or the amazing adaptation of all things in nature, we can scarcely believe that it is the result of chance. We look for . . . the mind behind the design . . ."

(Marcus Loane, in *Do You Now Believe?*)

S. Paul says: ". . . what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made". (Romans 1:19-20)

The Argument from Existence

It is natural for us to see the universe in terms of cause and effect. Our experience is that events can only be explained by a cause lying outside them. The music we hear is caused by a person playing the piano. Vapour condensed by cold falls as rain; the cold finds its explanation in something other than the vapour. We are driven to conclude that *all things are caused to exist by other things*, and to accept that if there is no Uncaused Being, then nothing could exist at all.

The Argument from the Idea of Perfection

Philosophers have sometimes thought that the widespread idea of "a Being possessed of all possible attributes to an infinite degree" (Anselm), can only be accounted for by the existence of such a Being. In other words, our idea of the true, the beautiful, and the good is attributed to the existence of him who is Perfect Truth, Perfect Beauty, and Perfect Goodness.

The Argument from Desire

Reflection on our own human experience leads most people to believe that far from being just a mass of chemical compounds (just *physical*), we are *spiritual* as well. We think, reason, love, appreciate beauty for its own worth, and try to work out the meaning of life. We also seem to have *needs* that are not just physical. In the evolutionary process, the development of a need suggests that it can be met. Our "immortal longing", our need for the spiritual, our hunger for God, our instinct to worship, suggests that God exists. C.S. Lewis put it rather starkly:

"Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire; well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." (in *Mere Christianity*)

The Argument from Experience

Most of us experience at one time or another a deep sense of awe and wonder at the marvels of the world around us. We are overwhelmed by everything from the miracle of a seed growing in the earth to the breath-taking vastness of the universe. This is expressed by the writer of Psalm 8:

"O Lord our God, how glorious is your name in all the earth! When I consider your heavens the work of your fingers: the moon and the stars which you have set in order; what is man that you should be mindful of him: or the son of man that you should care for him."

In his book *The Golden String*, the English author Bede Griffiths writes about a summer evening in his childhood when he went walking alone outside. He was seized with a sense of how beautiful everything was, and he wondered why he had never noticed this before. He says:

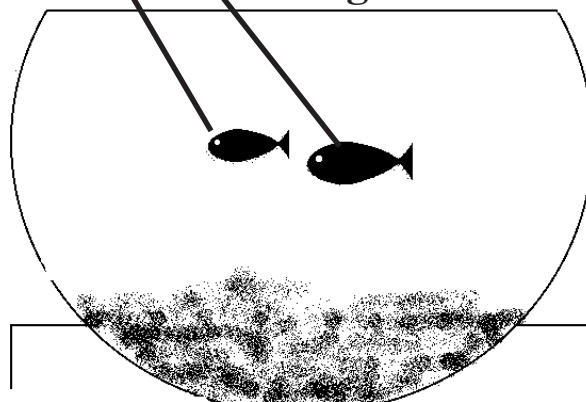
"Everything then grew still as the sunset faded . . . I remember now the feeling of awe which came over me. I felt inclined to kneel on the ground . . . Now I was suddenly made aware of another world of beauty and mystery such as I had never imagined existed".

Bede Griffiths says that it was as if God reached out and touched him. It was an experience he would never forget.

"Now that I look back on it, it seems to me to have been one of the decisive events of my life".

De you believe in God?

Why,, of course! Who do you think changes the water?



The Argument from Conscience

It is popular these days to deny the existence of moral absolutes. But at the same time we are constantly told to obey our conscience, and to never violate the conscience of others. This in its own way is a moral absolute. Moreover, by pondering the very *notion* of conscience and its judgment of moral right and wrong, many serious thinkers have come to believe in God.

"... God, or something like God, is the only adequate source and ground for the absolute moral obligation we all feel to obey our conscience. Conscience is thus explainable only as the voice of God in the soul. The Ten Commandments are ten divine footprints in our psychic sand." (Peter Kreeft & Ronald Tacelli in *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*).

Although it can be dulled, moulded, and violated, the existence of our moral sense, our conscience, is regarded by many to be a sign of our being made in "the image of God".

The Argument from Christ

Men and women often come to believe in God through reading the Gospels and sifting the evidence for Jesus Christ - his unique personal character, his claim to be the Revelation of God and, indeed, the Son of God, his death and his resurrection. History is littered with the stories of fair-minded people (like Professor Vanauken) who have taken the trouble to look into this for themselves, who have weighed up the historical evidence and concluded - sometimes against their will - that the only logical explanation is the truth of the New Testament claims about Jesus.

"How do you know God exists?"

"An interesting question - 'How do I know God exists?' or 'How can you know God exists?' Sometimes it might be better phrased, 'Why don't you keep on stacking up the evidence and I'll tell you when you can stop.'"

"If I can prove God exists, would you believe in him? If the answer is no, then the whole exercise is a pointless academic question. If yes, then it raises the question of how you prove anything."

"People often come to believe in God through pondering the classical arguments."

"The Christian claim is that in Jesus God came and lived among us so that we might know he is real. Therefore, a good way to begin looking for God is looking at Jesus." - Frances Penny

HASN'T SCIENCE DISPROVED THE BIBLE?

A genuine difficulty for many people is the apparent conflict between what the Bible says about creation and the findings of modern science.

In the nineteenth century, a number of scientific discoveries and theories shook the Christian world. In particular, Charles Darwin's first work on the theory of evolution (*The Origin of Species* published in 1859) was felt by many to be diametrically opposed to the teaching of "Genesis", the first book of the Bible. Today, the average Year 7 student who has just begun to learn about evolution believes that "science has disproved the Bible".

This ignores the fact that many academic scientists, representing all disciplines, are practising Christians.

It also ignores the fact that most scholars of the Bible believe the first eleven chapters of Genesis to be an *introduction*, a *symbolic pre-history*. In Australian terms we would say that they contain the *dreamtime* stories of the Hebrew people. These stories were passed on by word of mouth long before people began to write them down.

The Bible really begins in Genesis 12 with the call of God to Abraham. The first eleven chapters set the scene, so that we can understand why God involves himself in the flow of human history.

The ancient stories that make up the first eleven chapters of Genesis speak to us, not in *scientific language* but in *picture language*. That does not mean they are untrue; they are true in the same sense that the made-up stories ("parables") Jesus told are true.

The point is most easily made by summing up the teaching of Genesis 1 to 11:

1. God exists of himself.
2. God brought the universe into being by his Spirit and his Word.
3. We are the summit of God's creation.
4. We were intended to live in harmony with God, with one another, and with the whole creation.
5. We became arrogant, ignored God, succumbed to the temptation to go our own way, and forfeited our friendship with God.
6. The effects of this permeated the whole earth. Separated from God by our self-will and independence, we became subject to death.
7. Life became a struggle to survive against hostile elements and against cut-throat competition from other people; human relationships constantly break down, even within the home where there ought to be trust.

None of this is at variance with any particular scientific theory of *how* the universe came into being.

The Bible is not a science text book. Rather it seeks to explain *why* things are as we find them in the real world, and how God restores the harmony he originally intended.

This it does in a way that is *consistent, intelligible, and reasonable*.

In order to discover the sacred author's intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating then current. For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression.



Catechism of the Catholic Church, 110

SEEKING GOD

As human beings we instinctively seek "spiritual reality", the "soul of the universe", the "sacred", the "holy". The "God-shaped gap" we spoke about, that sense of inner emptiness, disturbs and haunts us until we give in to our natural instinct to seek God.

What really matters is that our quest for God is genuine. Words written in the Prophecy of Jeremiah 2,500 years ago still apply today:

*"You will seek me and find me
when you seek me with all your heart."
(Jeremiah 29:13)*

S. James put it this way:

*"Draw near to God
and he will draw near to you."
(James 4:8)*

And let's not forget what Jesus himself said:

*"Ask, and it will be given you;
seek, and you will find;
knock, and it will be opened to you
... for he who seeks finds."
(Matthew 7:7)*

Many honest seekers after God come to the Gospels which tell the story of Jesus Christ. They come with open minds, ready to believe and obey if God brings conviction to them. In other words, they give God a chance to confront them with himself.

If someone you know really wants to find God, encourage them to read through Mark's Gospel or John's Gospel in one sitting (preferably in a modern translation) and then to re-read it slowly, perhaps a chapter a day. Suggest to them that before they read, they say a prayer like this:

*God, I don't know whether you even exist
I think you may only be a myth.
But I am not certain
(at least when I am being honest with myself).*

*I am a genuine seeker of the truth,
whatever it is
and wherever it is.*

*If you do exist, you can hear me now.
Please help me to know the truth.*

To pray this kind of prayer honestly is to test the Christian hypothesis that God really is there, and that he honours all who earnestly search for truth. It tests the promise of Jesus:

"Seek and you will find."

RELUCTANT CONVERT

*Before God closed in on me,
I was in fact offered what now appears
a moment of wholly free choice.*

In a sense.

*I was going up Headington Hill
on the top of a bus.*

*Without words
and (I think) almost without images,
a fact about myself
was somehow presented to me.*

*I became aware
that I was holding something at bay,
or shutting something out.*

*Or, if you like,
that I was wearing some stiff clothing,
like corsets,
or even a suit of armour, as if I were a lobster.*

*I felt myself being, there and then,
given a free choice.*

*I could open the door or keep it shut;
I could unbuckle the armour or keep it on.
Neither choice was presented as a duty;
no threat or promise was attached to either,
though I knew
that to open the door
or to take off the corset
meant the incalculable.*

*The choice appeared to be momentous
but it was also strangely unemotional.*

I was moved by no desires or fears.

*In a sense I was not moved by anything.
I chose to open, to unbuckle, to loosen the rein.*

*I say, "I chose",
yet it did not really seem possible
to do the opposite.*

*On the other hand,
I was aware of no motives.
You could argue that I was not a free agent,
but I am more inclined to think
that this came nearer to being a perfectly free act
than most that I have ever done.*

*Amiable agnostics will talk cheerfully
about "man's search for God".*

*To me, as I then was,
they might as well have talked about
the mouse's search for the cat.*

*I gave in,
and admitted that God was God,
and knelt and prayed:
perhaps, that night,
the most dejected and reluctant convert
in all England.
I did not see
what is now the most shining and obvious thing;
the Divine humility
which will accept a convert
even on such terms.*

- C.S. Lewis (1893 - 1963) , in Surprised by Joy



Revelation and the Scriptures

AN INSPIRED LIBRARY

"The Bible is at once older than Christianity, and as young as yesterday. Nobody who has ever really read it would ever call it dull. It is crowded with colour, imagination and human experience. It can also be a bewildering book, because in it so many voices are speaking. They are speaking for themselves, and speaking for obscure men and women all over the world and in every century. The very variety ensures that somewhere all will hear their own voice." - Sr. Gretchen Kelly

The word "bible" comes from a Greek word simply meaning "the books". This reminds us that the Bible is not really one book, but a whole library, a collection of 73 books. (Although protestant editions of the Bible have less).

Contrary to what many people seem to think, the Bible did not fall from heaven completely written from Genesis to Revelation. In fact, it took more than sixteen hundred years for the Bible to reach its present form. It was written in three ancient languages, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek and many authors and compilers contributed to it, varying in background from common labourers to sheltered scholars and mighty kings. At first glance it might appear a hotch-potch of history, scraps of battle songs, legends, poems, family trees, legal codes, plays, short stories, prophecies, political speeches and sermons. But the startling fact is that all of this is drawn together by a unifying thread.

Taken as a whole, the Bible claims to be the story of God's activity in human history. A little corner of the Middle East was

the workshop in which God was to hammer out his plan for our salvation by preparing people for the coming of Christ and his Church. All this we can see from the Bible, in which it is claimed that God was revealing himself, not suddenly or completely, but step by step, a little at a time, as his people were ready for it. This is reflected in Hebrews 1:1-2:

*"In times past,
God spoke in fragmentary and varied ways
to our fathers through the prophets;
in this, the final age,
he has spoken to us through his Son . . ."*

The Bible is divided into two parts called the Old Testament and the New Testament. (A "testament" or "covenant" is an agreement between two parties, as when husband and wife at their marriage promise each other love and co-operation, or a conquering king promises rights and protection to a nation in return for its service.) The Old Testament is the story of the Jewish people before Christ. The New Testament recounts the coming of Christ and the early days of the Catholic Church.

THE WORD OF GOD

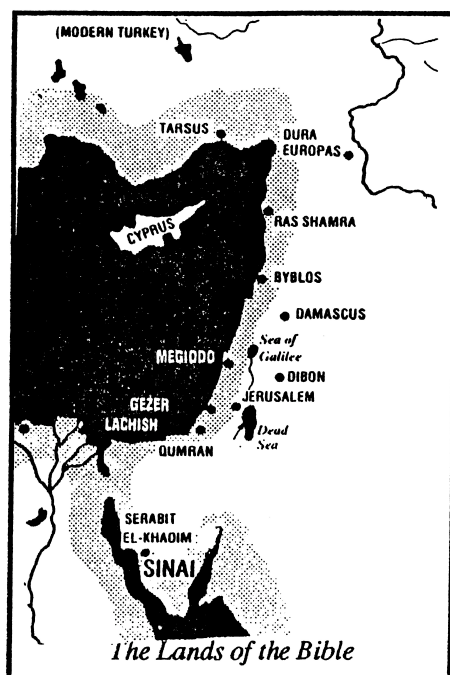
Christians receive the Bible not merely as a record of ancient events and teachings, but as the inspired, living word of God, containing God's message to all people of all times. We believe that God

himself inspired human beings to write the books of the Bible and through them he continues to enlighten our minds to know him better, and move our hearts to love him more.

THE CHURCH'S BOOK

The Bible is in a unique way the Church's own book, and to understand it correctly it must be considered within the framework of the Church, the People of God. The Old Testament belonged to and was produced by the then People of God, the chosen race of Israel, God's Church before the coming of Christ. It cannot be understood correctly apart from that framework. So also the New Testament must be seen and considered within the framework of the New People of God, the Catholic Church established by Jesus which produced it and to which it belongs.

Both Old and New Testaments belong to the Church, for the Old is perfected and fulfilled in the New. The Catholic Church of the first four centuries AD discerned which books should be used as Scripture. That same Church has the right and responsibility to explain what Scripture means. We should be careful not to accept those interpretations of the Bible that contradict the teaching of the Church that gave it to us in the first place (in particular those interpretations that have emerged from extreme protestant groups during the last 450 years).



THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament is mainly concerned with God's "covenant" ("agreement"/"relationship") with the Jews before the birth of Jesus Christ.

The book **Genesis** tells how, about nineteen hundred years before Christ, God prompted Abraham to leave the city of Ur in Mesopotamia and go into a district called Israel and Jordan. God promised to favour and guard him and his descendants and make them great and numerous if they honoured and obeyed him.

They were at first a group of Semitic tribes wandering about Palestine. Then famine drove them to Egypt. There they became rich and numerous, but under later kings, who disliked the Semitic peoples, they were treated as slaves.

The book **Exodus** tells how God raised up the great prophet Moses to lead them out of Egypt in spite of opposition from the Egyptian king. He led them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and across the Sinai desert back to their own land.

The Covenant

At Mount Sinai in the desert, God made a covenant with his people. They witnessed a terrifying display of his power in thunder, lightning and eruptions of the mountain. They gathered in worship below as Moses went up to be alone with God. There he was given a deeper insight into the nature of God and his will for his people. Under the direction of Moses, laws for divine worship and right living were drawn up. A short summary of God's law in ten statements was engraved on two tablets of stone. These are called the Ten Commandments. The people promised to serve the one true God and keep his commandments, and God promised to help and save them. This covenant was sealed in blood. The life of an animal was offered to God and its blood was sprinkled in the presence of God.

The Israelites ceased to be a band of runaway slaves and marched bravely under God's guidance and protection to take possession of their own land and set up the nation of Israel, with its own government, laws and place of worship.

Kings and Prophets

God acted continually upon his Chosen People through kings and prophets whom he enlightened and guided. The greatest of the kings was David, who lived about 1000 B.C. He planned to build a place of worship, the temple, and under his inspiration many beautiful hymns, called "psalms", were collected and written for use in divine worship. But it was left to his son, Solomon, to build the splendid temple, and elaborate ceremonies for divine worship in it were devised.

God taught his people mainly through inspired preachers called "prophets", who were raised up in every age, convinced that they spoke with God's authority and delivered his message. In some of the most sublime language ever spoken, the



Law



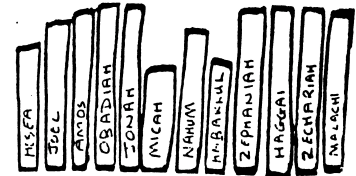
History



Wisdom



Major Prophets



Minor Prophets

prophets rebuked the people for practising the vices of the pagan nations, called upon them to worship the one true God, and told of his loving kindness towards them. In the ringing tones of their noble language and the beauty of their thought, the message of God is recognised today as it was by the people who first heard it.

Between the years 800 and 600 B.C. there was a series of these religious leaders, the greatest of whom were **Isaiah** and **Jeremiah**. The prophets had their speeches written down. Also they collected the ancient traditions of the people and the chronicles of the early kings in books called **Deuteronomy**, **Judges**, **Samuel** and **Kings**.

Scribes

The powerful neighbouring kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon frequently raided the Israelites and carried off slaves. In 587 B.C. the Babylonians conquered them, destroyed their Temple and carried so many of them off into captivity that it was more or less the end of the Kingdom. But the exiles continued to practise their religion, and God continued to raise up prophets to speak in his name, such as **Ezekiel** and **Habakkuk** whose writings became part of the Old Testament.

When the Persians conquered Babylon, a party of zealous Jews were allowed to return home. They began to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the Temple under the inspiring lead of **Ezra**. He was a scribe, a writer who studied and copied the ancient sacred writings, and he impressed on the people that these were the words of God and must be preserved and honoured. A school of scribes was established, which became a permanent institution. Gradually they put together the Old Testament as we have it today.

They wrote down the old "Bible stories" which described in picture language the beginnings of the human race and of the people of Israel. They collected the thoughts and meditations of wise men in the books of **Proverbs** and **Ecclesiastes**, events in the reigns of various kings in the book of **Chronicles**; old moral stories in the books of **Ruth**, **Job** and **Esther**. A collection of hymns, ancient and modern, was made, called the book of **Psalms**, some of which dated back to the days of King David. These beautiful songs are sung to this day. They express the joys, hopes and sorrows of the human heart as it turns towards God.

The Later Books of the Old Testament

The Greek king of Syria ruled the Israelites in the second century B.C. and tried to force them to adopt the religion of the Empire and the Greek language. During the persecution under

לְכָל הַסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה כָּתוּב בְּלִשָּׁנָה עִבְרִית:

עֲלֵה לְפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Most of the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew

him, a pious Jew wrote the book of **Daniel**, a collection of six stories telling how the Jews stood up to persecution in Babylon of old, and four visions promising a good time to come. It was written mainly in Hebrew, though parts of it were in Greek. A wise man called Ben Sira wrote **Sirach**, a collection of wise sayings written in Hebrew, which his grandson translated into Greek. The great deeds of a family of warriors called the "Maccabees", who led Jewish revolts against the conquerors, were written in two books, one in Greek, one in Hebrew, later

translated into Greek, and known as the **Books of Maccabees**. Finally, around 140 BC, a Greek Jew wrote in Greek one of the most spiritual and lofty books of the Bible, **The Book of Wisdom**.

There were three other books in Greek, based on Hebrew writings, namely the moral stories of **Tobias** and **Judith** and the prophecy of **Baruch**.

WHY SOME BIBLES HAVE LESS OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

A Greek translation of the whole Old Testament, which included the books *written* in Greek (**1 & 2 Maccabees, Judith, Tobit, Baruch, Sirach and Wisdom**), was complete by 116BC. This is the version of the Old Testament that was used by the early Christians, right from the time of the Apostles.

Consequently, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches have always accepted the "Greek" books as truly part of the Bible. At several meetings of bishops in the fourth century, the "Canon" (list of books that constitute the Bible) was drawn up and these Greek books were included. To this day the Church uses them constantly in her worship because they contain some of the most beautiful and rewarding passages in the Bible.

Some Jews did not regard these Greek writings as having equal authority to the books originally written in Hebrew. This view came to prevail amongst the Jews by the time the Jewish idea of what books constitute (Old Testament) Scripture became settled in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

In contrast to the practice of the Church since the days of the Apostles, protestants adopted this late Jewish view in the 16th century, and excluded the books written in Greek from their editions of the Old Testament.

These books are often referred to as the "Deutero-Canonical Books" or the "Apocrypha".

THE NEW TESTAMENT



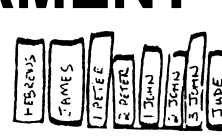
Gospels



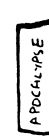
History



Paul's Letters



Other Letters



Revelation

Jesus Christ and the first Christians cherished the Old Testament as the word of God. It was the Bible of the Apostles. But God continued to move and inspire the writing of books which the Church accepted as having the same authority as the Old Testament. The first followers of Jesus Christ joyfully announced the good news of his life, death and resurrection, and almost certainly short collections both of the sayings and deeds of Jesus were put into writing soon after his death and devoutly kept by the Christians. But the earliest Christian writings we have are the letters of Paul and other Apostles.

The Letters

About ten years after the death and resurrection of Christ, a Jewish teacher and writer named Saul, later called Paul, became a Christian. He was specially chosen by God and was commissioned by the Apostles to preach. He began travelling through the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, establishing Christian Churches. We have thirteen letters written by him in which he explains Christ's teaching and urges his readers to follow it. He wrote to the **Corinthians** (two letters), the **Galatians**, the **Ephesians**, the **Thessalonians** (two letters), the **Colossians**, the **Philippians**, the **Romans**, as well as the letters to **Timothy** (two letters), **Titus**, and **Philemon**.

The apostles **Peter, James, John** and **Jude** wrote similar, though shorter, letters to distant Christian communities. A long treatise called the **Letter to the Hebrews** was written to a community of Jews who seem to have been tempted to return to the beliefs and practices of their ancestors. During a violent persecution of the Christians by the Roman Emperor, S. John, or one of his disciples, wrote a book called **Revelation** (sometimes known as **The Apocalypse**). Like the book of Daniel, it describes visions and symbolic pictures which represent Jesus as Lord and Saviour triumphing over the evils of the pagan world and ensuring the ultimate happiness of his followers.

These writings were loved and venerated by the Christian communities, copied and handed around, read aloud in the churches as the word of God and came to be treated as having equal authority to the books of the Old Testament.

The Gospels

It was thought necessary to have a fuller written account of the life and teaching of Jesus based on the evidence of those who had heard him speak. There are four of these called the Gospels. It is most likely that **Mark**, companion of S. Paul on one of his missionary journeys and disciple of S. Peter, wrote the first. He probably used written material already available. **Matthew**, one of the apostles who had been with Jesus during his public ministry, used this book as the basis of his Gospel, written with Jewish readers in mind. **Luke**, a Greek doctor who had been S. Paul's travelling companion, also used it, as well as other writings, and questioned eye-witnesses on the events, to write the third gospel. He also wrote a book called **The Acts of the Apostles**, which is an account of the early years of the Church's life. **John** the Apostle, towards the end of his life, wrote the fourth Gospel.

These four Gospels tell the same Good News, for the same purpose, but in different ways. They proclaim the events of Christ's birth, death and resurrection in order to move the hearers to believe in him and have eternal life.

1 Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ.

2 Ἀβραὰμ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰσαὰκ, Ἰσαὰκ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰακώβ, Ἰακώβ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰούδαν καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοῦ, 3 Ἰούδας δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Φάρες καὶ

The New Testament was written in Greek

HISTORY IN THE BIBLE

A lot of the Bible is made up of religious poetry, colourful legends, poetic sermons, moral stories and explanations of religious teaching. Much of it is also history. Like all history, it is written for a purpose. Events are selected and described to show how God saved his people in order that the readers might be moved to believe in him and serve him. Christians often refer to this as 'salvation history'.

Sometimes the writers use colourful and dramatic stories of ancient times to teach religious truth. For example, the truth that God created the universe and the human race, and that man's sin brought evil and unhappiness is told in the story of Adam and Eve, the serpent and the forbidden fruit. The truth that man deserved to be wiped out for his sins, yet a chosen people were saved by a merciful God, is told in the ancient story of the great flood and Noah who was saved with his family in the ark.

The writers of the Gospels, however, make it clear that they believe themselves to be recording facts in a way similar to that

of the modern historian. They emphasize that they or their informants witnessed the events they record, therefore inviting the normal kind of scrutiny under which *any* purported event is placed by modern historical scholarship. S. John says that he wrote about things

*"which we have heard,
which we have seen with our eyes,
which we have looked upon
and touched with our hands". (1 John 1:1)*

S. Luke tells us that he is recording things
*"delivered to us by those
who from the beginning
were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word".
(Luke 1:2)*

The Gospel writers are interested in facts - real events - above all the fact of Jesus' resurrection, which is the central historical claim upon which the whole Christian faith depends.

INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

All Christians are happy to accept the authority of the Church of the first four centuries on the question of which sacred books constitute the Bible. Catholic Christians believe that this same Church is responsible for interpreting the meaning of the Bible in her formulation of doctrine. God enlightens all readers of Scripture, but he does not expect individuals to construct their own belief systems on the basis of "private interpretation"

The theory of "private interpretation", taught by protestants since the sixteenth century, has given rise to thousands of Christian sects, all with different beliefs and practices, yet all claiming to base their version of Christianity on the Bible.

It is not surprising, then, that the Catholic Church of Jesus warns people about the dangers of private interpretation of the Bible in doctrinal matters. *She has done so from the beginning.* Indeed, in the Bible itself we find S. Peter warning the early Christians in his second letter:

"There are some things in them (i.e. Paul's letters) hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures". (2 Pet 3:16)

And according to the Bible itself, the Catholic and Apostolic Church is

"... the household of God... the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)

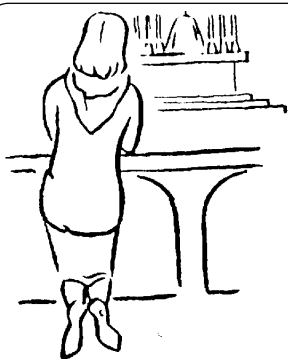
The whole matter of interpreting the Bible was amplified by the Second Vatican Council:

"Those who search out the intention of the sacred writers must, among other things, have regard for 'literary forms'. For truth is proposed and expressed in a variety of ways, depending on whether a text is history of one kind or another, or whether its form is that of prophecy, poetry, or some other type of speech. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expresses in particular circumstances as he used contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of perceiving, speaking, and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the customs normally followed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another. But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture,

BIBLICAL DATES

	The Beginning, or "Primeval History"	Genesis 1-11
BC 1850-	The Patriarchal Period <i>Abraham</i>	Genesis 12-50
1250-	Moses and Joshua	Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Leviticus
1200-931	From the Judges to Solomon <i>David 1010-970 Solomon 970-931 The Golden Age</i>	Judges, 1&2 Samuel 1 Kings 1-11 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles 1-9
931-721	The Divided Kingdom <i>The Fall of Samaria 721</i>	1 Kings 12-22; 2 Kings 1-17 2 Chronicles 10-28 Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah
721-587	The End of the Kingdom of Judah <i>The Exile 586-538</i>	2 Kings 18-25 2 Chronicles 29-36 Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
587-333	The Persian Period <i>Return from the Exile 538</i>	Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Job, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ruth, Psalms, Joel, Obadiah
333-63	The Hellenistic Period <i>The Maccabees 168-37</i>	1&2 Maccabees Daniel, Jonah, Tobit
63BC-135AD	The Roman Period	
BC8-4	<i>Birth of Jesus Christ</i>	
AD30	<i>Death of Jesus</i>	Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
45-58	<i>Missionary Journeys of S. Paul</i>	Acts, Letters
50-99*	<i>The N.T. is written 1st Jewish Revolt 66-70 2nd Jewish Revolt 132-135</i>	
* But note that some modern scholars, like J. A. T. Robinson, believe that all the N.T. books were finished before AD70.		

if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly brought to light. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith... The way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God."



Discovering Jesus

“All the armies that have ever marched, and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has this one solitary life - the life of Jesus Christ.”

- Bishop Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)

There is no doubt that Jesus is still news. From the 1970's on, there has been a succession of songs, show-biz productions, documentaries, musicals and television presentations on the "Jesus" theme. Some have been conservative; others have been radical. But whichever way you look at it, "Jesus" will not go away!

His influence on history is reflected in the calendar. BC - "before Christ". AD (Anno Domini) - "in the year of our Lord."

No other religious leader has gained such a wide and revered acceptance from so many religions. No other religious leader has influenced so many peoples and cultures. From a purely historical point of view, most people find they have to agree that Jesus was a uniquely wise and holy man.

But, as a result of their thinking and experience, Christians want to say more . . . that Jesus is "God-in-the-flesh", that in Jesus, God showed himself to the world in human form.

WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

1. Jesus lived and ministered in a tiny country in the Middle East during the time of Herod Antipas.
2. In adulthood he became a rabbi, a holy man, a popular Jewish teacher who went about trying to reform the religion of his people.
3. While remaining within mainstream Judaism, attending Synagogue and Temple services, he also taught the coming of the "Kingdom of God" which all must accept.
4. His popularity was increased by his reputation as a miracle worker, having apparently remarkable powers of healing and exorcism of demons (evil spirits).
5. His ministry lasted for about three years (most likely 28-31 AD), during which he upset a great number of religious leaders with his teaching.
6. He went to Jerusalem where a plot was hatched against him and, following the accusations of Caiaphas the high priest, was put to death by the horrific method of crucifixion under the authority of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor.
7. Three days after his crucifixion, some women said that they had gone to the tomb where he had been buried and found the tomb empty of his corpse.
8. The movement led by him grew and spread westwards to Rome. His followers proclaimed, at great personal cost, that he had risen from the dead. The community they established - the "Church" - has lasted for two thousand years.

These are the FACTS. They are accepted as such by historians of all persuasions *on the basis of the available historical evidence*, including evidence *external* to the New Testament.

CAN THE NEW TESTAMENT BE TRUSTED?

There are three basic tests that historians apply to ancient sources in order to see if they are accurate and reliable.

The Bibliographical Test

We do not have any of the actual papyrus used by the Gospel writers (nor the paper on which Shakespeare wrote his plays, for that matter!). To decide whether our copies of any ancient document are accurate, the experts ask two questions:

- (a) How many copies do we have?
- (b) How near in time are the copies to the original document?



When compared with other important literature confidently used by historians, the New Testament is in a league of its own. Aristotle wrote his Poetics around 343 BC; the earliest copy we have comes from 1100 AD, leaving a time gap of 1,400 years. And there are only five manuscripts available. Caesar wrote his history of the Gaulic Wars between 58 and 50 BC; the earliest

copy we have comes from 950 AD, leaving a time gap of 1,000 years. In this case there are ten manuscripts available. Josephus wrote his Jewish War shortly after 70 AD. There are nine manuscripts, the earliest being a Latin translation dating from the 5th century; the other eight are Greek manuscripts dating from the 10th century or later. Tacitus wrote his Annals of Imperial Rome (the chief history of the period) at the turn of the 1st century. Only one manuscript survives for Annals 1 to 6, and one for Annals 11-16. These date from c900 AD.

In contrast, the case for the New Testament is staggering. The early Christians' habit of meeting on a "fixed day" (Pliny - 112 AD) for the Eucharist at which the "memoirs of the apostles" (Justin - 150 AD) were read (as they are to this day), accounts for both the proliferation and preservation of the New Testament writings. We have copies of the Gospels going back to within a century of their composition (the oldest fragment being dated at 130 AD). The rapid expansion of the Church during the early centuries necessitated a constant supply of

copies. There still exist more than five thousand early manuscripts of all or part of the New Testament in Greek. If we add to that manuscripts of early translations (into Coptic, Latin, Syria, Armenian, Georgian, etc.) the number exceeds twenty thousand!

It is not surprising, then, that modern scholars are confident that we have the New Testament documents as they were written. (The only major questions have to do with Mark 16 and John 8. Variant readings from the ancient manuscripts are recorded in the footnotes of the R.S.V. translation. None of these affect questions of history or doctrine.)

The Internal Evidence Test

This seeks to find the extent to which a document is credible. In other words, historians explore the writer's ability to tell the truth, something that is closely related to the witnesses' proximity both geographically and chronologically to the events recorded.

- * The New Testament documents themselves claim to be recorded either by eye witnesses, or by people who had eye witness accounts related to them.

- * The time between the life of Jesus and the literature about it is far shorter than for other great contemporary figures. A mere seventeen years separates the death of Jesus and S. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians. And taking 90 AD as the latest possible date for the Gospels, less than sixty years separate these documents from their principal character. (Keep in mind that some significant modern scholars believe *all* the New Testament literature to have been written before 70 AD, reducing the time period to a mere 40 years). This means that they were being circulated in written form within the lifetime of people who observed the events described, and who would certainly confirm or deny their accuracy. The apostles, after all, were known to appeal (even when confronting their most severe opponents) to common knowledge concerning Jesus.

- * The number of authors *contributing independently* to the literature about Jesus (nine or ten) compares favourably with what we have in the case of other historical figures of the time.

- * The writers obviously *believed* that they were telling the truth about Jesus, for we know that they were all prepared to pay for what they said with their lives.

The External Evidence Test

This is concerned with other historical material supporting or disproving the accuracy, reliability and authenticity of the internal evidence.

- * **Non-Biblical Sources:** It is true that most of the historical evidence for Jesus comes from his followers. But there is

information about him from others, including those outside the Christian community, some of whom were quite hostile. The Jewish historian Josephus (37- c.100 AD) twice referred to Jesus, noting his teaching, reported miracles and death on the cross. In the early second century, Roman officials and historians (Tacitus, Suetonius and Pliny) write about the Christian movement, noting that the sect's originator was someone known as "Christ".

- * **Archaeology:** Sir William Ramsey (1851-1939) is regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists of all time. He had been taught that Luke-Acts was a product of the mid second century and therefore not a trustworthy account of what things were like in 50 AD. So, in his research on the history of Asia Minor, he paid almost no attention to the New Testament. His research, however, eventually forced him to reconsider the writings of S. Luke. He observed the meticulous accuracy of historical details, and gradually he changed his mind. He ended up saying, "*Luke is an historian of the first rank. This author should be placed along with the very greatest historians.*" Whenever it is possible to check historical details against the findings of archaeology, the evidence supports our confidence in the Gospels.

Why is this important?

Because it is the starting point for any investigation of the purported historical event on which the Christian religion stands or falls - the resurrection of Jesus.

Beginning with the view that the New Testament documents are demonstrably as historical in character as, say, the writings of Josephus or Philo (both Jews who wrote in the same time frame as the New Testament), we can then properly weigh the evidence for the resurrection. The problem is that many otherwise honest people decide on philosophical grounds *before their investigation begins* that the possibility of a real resurrection must be ruled out. Then they purport to carry out an objective evaluation of the evidence. This kind of methodology would not normally be accepted by professional historians as fair and unprejudiced!

A truly honest and objective investigation would allow the resurrection of Christ to remain as one of the possible conclusions (however unlikely we might consider it to be). We then let the evidence speak for itself, as we would with any other purported historical event. By taking this approach, many former agnostics and atheists have come to accept the resurrection as an event of real history, as well as its logical consequence, that Jesus is who he says he is.

If this is a conclusion to which we refuse to be driven by any amount of historical evidence, we should be honest and admit it, and then stop accusing our Christian friends of being the ones with their heads in the sand!

WHAT DID JESUS SAY ABOUT HIMSELF?

In trying to work out the significance of Jesus, we must look at some of the things he taught about himself. A good starting point is John 14:6, where he says "*I am the WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE*".

"The WAY"

"Where do you come from?" is the first question we usually ask when we meet someone. People kept asking Jesus that question and were puzzled by his reply:

"I have come from the Father and have come into the world" (John 16:28)

What did he mean?

Much of what Jesus taught had already been taught by the Jewish rabbis. The rift between them developed only when Jesus claimed, not that obedience to his rules would get you into heaven, but that *he was himself the kingdom of heaven in the world*. In other words, he did not just say "follow my teaching", which the rabbis might have found acceptable; he

said "believe in me". Other religious leaders point people to God; we find Jesus continually pointing men and women to himself - an outrageous thing to do, unless he is God.



"The TRUTH"

So often we think of Jesus as telling us what God is like. But that is not the whole story. According to the evidence, Jesus did not just see himself revealing the truth *about* God; he taught that he was the truth, that he was God. In other words, he challenged people

not only to believe his message, but to believe in HIM.

According to Jesus, his *deeds* reveal God to us. In particular he taught that his miracles were performed to show that God is present and at work in the world through him.

In his ministry to others, he claimed to be able to forgive sin - something that was blasphemous in the eyes of his contemporaries, for *"only God can forgive sins"* (Matthew 9:5-6).

In addition, Jesus demanded that people commit themselves to him as "Lord and Master", and he claimed to be

ushering in a new era of God's love, the messianic age longed for by many Jews.

He is the LIFE

Jesus once said: *"I have come to give them life in all its fulness"* (John 10:10)

Death is one thing over which we have no power. Time and time again, Jesus speaks to his followers about receiving "eternal life" from him. Furthermore, he said that this is both a "here and now" gift, as well as living forever in God's love.

THE CROSS

Like all captured and occupied peoples, the first century Jews were looking for someone who would lead them to victory and freedom; a king, a military leader who would defeat evil by force. Down through the centuries, the Old Testament prophets had often spoken of such a leader - the Son of Man - the Messiah - the Chosen One - the Anointed One.

To the people of his time Jesus had all the attributes of this promised Messiah. The people expected that he and his followers would destroy the Roman taskmasters and give the Jews a role of honour in the New Kingdom.

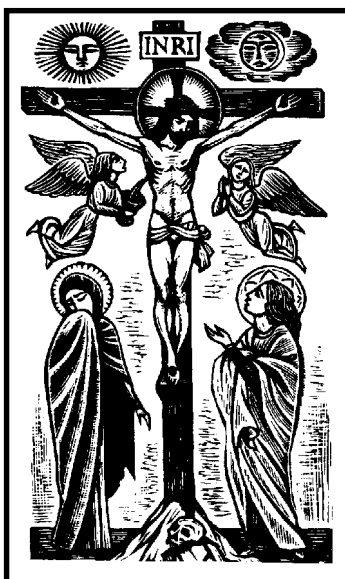
Jesus, however, came preaching love, and by living what he preached, tried to make people realise that evil can only be overcome by good. Because of this, together with his claim to be God, he was crucified.

In Jewish eyes crucifixion was a sign that a man had been cursed in the eyes of God.

Even a cursory glance at the New Testament reveals that the apostles believed the crucifixion to be neither an accident of fate, nor a tragedy which could have been avoided. Jesus himself had taught that his death was an inevitable and necessary part of his mission. It was voluntary. Jesus said:

"No-one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:18) and: *"The Son of Man came not to be served . . . but to give his life as a ransom for many."* (Mark 10:45)

So, far from being a dreadful mistake, the crucifixion of Jesus shows us what God is really like. We see how much he cares. Jesus stretches wide his arms and prays *"Father forgive them."* In the nails we recognise our sin and selfishness, the times we have turned away from God, the times we have failed him and others. But in the outstretched arms we recognise



God's answer - through Jesus he accepts us, he longs to embrace us. Through the cross we find forgiveness and the chance to begin again.

The early Christians taught that Jesus died:

1. In order to bring people to God. (1 Peter 3:18)
2. As a sacrifice to take our sins away. (1 John 1:5 - 2:2)
3. As our substitute. (Romans 5:6-10)
4. To reconcile everything in heaven and earth. (Colossians 1:20)
5. To win the victory over all evil powers. (Colossians 2:15, John 12:31)

In the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, God, in his love for us, became fully human. In his crucifixion at Calvary, God shares completely in human suffering even accepting death. Jesus takes upon himself the world's burden of sin and suffering and offers it on the cross and in that offering it is somehow changed. It is redeemed. The cross becomes a symbol of hope, a symbol of salvation.

The prophecy of Isaiah 53:3-5 came true on the cross:

"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows; familiar with suffering . . . Surely he took up our infirmities, he carried our sorrows . . . and by his wounds we are healed."

HE IS RISEN . . . ALLELUIA!

The Christian claim is that by the resurrection of Jesus, a way is opened through death to new life, a way through darkness to radiant light, a way through apparent defeat to glorious victory.

For us, though, the resurrection is not a distant event. We believe that God wants us to share his new life, to live in his light, to enjoy his victory, to be an Easter people. We believe that he wants us to welcome the risen Christ into the centre of our lives.

The early Christians were convinced that Jesus died on a cross, and that he was restored to life three days later.

Two things made them believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead:

1. On the Sunday morning his body was missing from the tomb.

2. People started seeing him alive.

You can read the Gospel accounts in Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24 and John 20:1-21;22.

These appearances of the risen Jesus continued for nearly six weeks. They are summarised in 1 Corinthians 15:3-6.

Those first Christians were suddenly transformed from disappointed and frightened mourners into joyful, powerful preachers whose message spread like wildfire throughout the Empire. Something had obviously happened to convince them that Jesus was still present with them. And Christians today share that same belief.

The despair Jesus' disciples felt at the time of the crucifixion turned to joy at the realisation that Jesus had risen from the dead. These same disciples would undergo all manner of trials and persecution to proclaim that Christ is risen!

More than anything else, these first Christians bore witness to the fact that in the resurrection of Jesus, God had reached out to them - they had been given a new life - their sins had been forgiven. From those first eleven apostles came the message

proclaimed by Jesus. We are no longer stuck with sin - everyone can, if they wish, respond to Christ and learn to live with a new kind of power.

The Christian proclamation of Jesus as our Saviour had begun. He was not just a good man, a teacher, but God made man. Once and for all he has changed our human situation - each generation of Christians bears witness to the new life we receive when we follow him.

RESURRECTION OF *THE BODY*?

"Because there still appear to be people who, after nearly a century of relativity and quantum theory, think of the material world as composed of indestructible ultramicroscopic billiard-balls controlled by fixed unalterable laws, it may be well to recall that modern physics views the world as a spatio-temporal manifold of centres of energy and spontaneity; in such a world Jesus' resurrection may well be seen, not as a violation or an overriding of the inherent and proper workings of nature, but rather as their joyful and blessed fulfilment, in bringing nature to a perfection that it could not reach by its own efforts." (E.M. Mascall)

"The Word of God laid hold of a human body and assumed it . . . It was in and with the body taken of Mary that Jesus accepted the conditions of human existence . . . It was in body, mind and spirit that he lived our humanity for the Father, finally giving himself in the one perfect sacrifice. It was in the body of his flesh, the body taken of Mary, that he broke the power of evil and the nexus of sin. The created world, of which his body was part, was liberated and glorified by his resurrection. To suggest that, when S. Luke says that the disciples do not find the body of the Lord Jesus when they entered the tomb, he was merely expressing in a symbolical way the truth that the spirit of Jesus survived death, is not merely to question his veracity; it is to attribute a way of thinking to S. Luke which is quite alien to that of the earliest Christians . . . To see the resurrection as no more than a spiritual experience is to abandon the biblical understanding and to pronounce a decree absolute between spirit and matter."

(Graham Leonard)

"The notion that the resurrection of Christ was a purely 'spiritual' affair while his corpse remained the tomb, is a very modern one, which rests on theories of the impossibility of miracle drawn from nineteenth-century physics." (Alan Richardson)

JESUS - GOD AND MAN

This is how theologians sum up what we have said so far. The life of Jesus is not only "inspired" by God (for many other people's lives have been "inspired"). Jesus is God in the flesh; he is God expressed in human terms.

Jesus is GOD and MAN at the same time. In him HEAVEN and EARTH, SPIRIT and MATTER, the UNSEEN and the SEEN, come together in unity. God the Son "took flesh" (John 1:14). God walked this earth, suffered on this earth, bled on this earth, and burst victorious from the grave to live forevermore.

What's more, the experience of millions of Christians says that he is alive. The Church, for all its faults, claims to be the community gathered around the risen Jesus. Looking forward to the time after his death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus had said to his Disciples:

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst." (Matthew 18:20)

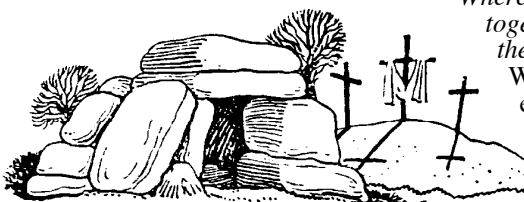
We meet him in so many different ways - when we celebrate the Sacraments, when we pray, when we read the Bible, when we serve others.

RESPONDING TO JESUS

Nearly two thousand years ago, Jesus asked his followers, *"Who do you say that I am?"* (Matthew 18:15) At the end of the day, each one of us is faced with the same question. We must make up our minds.

If we say that Jesus was just a good and holy man who taught and lived a good life, then our response will be to try and follow his example. Many people take this line.

If we accept the truth of the resurrection, then Jesus is not just a good and holy man, but GOD HIMSELF, ALIVE AND ACTIVE IN THE WORLD TODAY as he was 2000 years ago. Christianity ceases to be about imitating a good life that was lived in the first century AD, and becomes a matter of acknowledging Jesus to be the Lord of the universe and of our lives, right here and now. It becomes a matter of joining the community in which his risen life is shared. It becomes a matter of opening ourselves to his love.



LUNATIC, LIAR, or LORD?

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Jesus:

'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.'

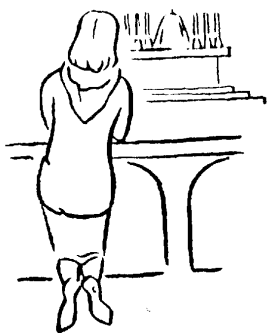
That is the one thing we must not say.

A man who was merely a man and said the sorts of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell.

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God.

But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

- C.S. Lewis



The Church of God

THE CREED

At every Sunday Mass, we proclaim our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed. This reminds us of the early days of the Church when those who were about to be baptised had to declare openly their Christian belief. The words of the Nicene Creed, though put together in the fourth century, can be traced back to the lips of early Christians in the Church of Jerusalem.

When we were baptized we were joined to the dying and rising of Jesus. We were born again into his new life. We became Christians. In other words, we joined the Church of God which spans both the centuries and the continents. Each Sunday at Mass when we take the words of the Creed upon our lips, it is as though we unite ourselves with Christian disciples of every time, with all who have followed the way of Jesus since the beginning.

We also unite ourselves with Christians all over the world today - with people who in vastly different circumstances and cultures, who follow in the footsteps of the Apostles. That is why we say in the Creed, "We believe in the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church." The word "**CATHOLIC**" means universal, all encompassing. When we profess the Creed together we realise that we are part of something incredibly vast, a world-wide family that reaches back to the first Christians, and that blurs the boundary between heaven and earth.

There are parts of the Creed that can be difficult to understand. Don't worry. The Creed is the Church's attempt to put into human words the very mystery of God himself. But one central truth is crystal clear:

***"He became incarnate
of the Virgin Mary
and was made man."***

God loves us so much that he sent Jesus in human flesh to share our life and to be our Saviour. He died on the cross for us, and rose again in victory, making us his people for ever. This is the Easter Faith of the Church. We all have to grow in the Faith; but we must also accept that it will take more than a lifetime to fathom its depths. The important thing is that each day we glimpse a little more of God's amazing love for us. We can't do that on our own. Jesus intends that we live our lives *in community* with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The focal point of our life together is Sunday Mass.



***"We are an
EASTER PEOPLE,
and
ALLELUIA
is our song"***

- S. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

"church" ???

The word "church" in the original Greek of the New Testament is "*ekklesia*" meaning "*those who are called to meet together*". In other words, from age to age God "*calls together*" or "*gathers*" his people to himself.

We use the word "church" to describe:

- * the meeting together of Christians.
(Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:19, 28, 34, 35)
- * the local Christian community.
(Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:2; 16:1)
- * the universal company of believers.
(Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13;
Philippians 3:6)

Remember, the Creed began as baptismal promises. To this day, people being baptised and confirmed renounce evil and express the Faith in a "question and answer" way, using an older form of the Creed:

Do you reject sin, so as to live in the freedom of God's children? **I do.**

Do you reject the glamour of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin? **I do.**

Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness? **I do.**

Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth? **I do.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father? **I do.**

Do you 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? **I do.**

This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

CATHOLIC OR PROTESTANT?

Among Christians there are two main views of the "Church".

One group of Christians, known as "**PROTESTANTS**", believe that being a Christian is primarily an individual relationship with God through Jesus Christ. For them the church is a gathering of believers who come together to share their faith and strengthen one another in this essentially individual relationship with God. From their perspective it is not important whether you are "Uniting Church", "Presbyterian", "Baptist", "Lutheran", "Church of Christ", or "Assemblies of God". What matters is your private relationship with God. (These protestant communities contain very sincere and holy people, but their teaching about the Church and the way of salvation has only been around for the last quarter of the Christian era, and we must be careful not to be influenced by them.)

The other group, known as "**CATHOLICS**", comprising 78% of all Christians in the world today, have believed since the time of Jesus that although being a Christian is intensely personal, it is *primarily* a matter of belonging to the community called "Church" that Jesus gathered around himself. In this community, the apostles were given authority to preach, convert, teach and celebrate sacraments. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, these same apostles established congregations all over the world. The Catholic view (as held by Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Anglicans) is that the Church itself is a supernatural reality, part of the will of Christ. **In this view it is vital for us to belong to the church or churches which are visibly part of the original "apostolic" Church founded by Jesus.** Only there can be found the fulness of his life, his teaching and his discipline. Only there can our individual spiritual journeys be correctly understood and interpreted.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Some people are rather surprised to discover that the Bible supports the **CATHOLIC** view of the Church outlined above.

"Jesus said . . . and I tell you, you are Peter, and ON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH, AND THE POWERS OF DEATH SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:18-19)



S. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: *"I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made*

him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for THE CHURCH, WHICH IS HIS BODY, THE FULNESS OF HIM WHO FILLS ALL IN ALL." (Ephesians 1:16-23)

S. Paul also wrote: *"I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD, THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH."* (1 Timothy 14-15)

In other passages of the New Testament, we find the Church described as:

- * **the Body of Christ**
(1 Corinthians 12:12-22, Romans 12:4-5)
- * **the City of God**
(Hebrews 11:10-16, 12:22, Revelation 21:2-3)
- * **God's family**
(Ephesians 2:19, 3:14-15; Hebrews 3:6)
- * **God's flock**
(John 10:1-16, 1 Peter 5:4-5)
- * **the Bride of Christ**
(Ephesians 5:31-32, Revelation 21:29, 22:17, 2 Cor. 11:2)
- * **God's army**
(Ephesians 6:11-12, 2 Timothy 2:3-4)
- * **branches of the vine**
(John 15)
- * **God's cultivated field**
(1 Corinthians 3:5-7)
- * **a royal priesthood**
(1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 1:6)
- * **the temple of God**
(1 Peter 2:5, Ephesians 2:20-22)
- * **God's new Israel, his people**
(1 Peter 2:9, Galatians 3:16-17)

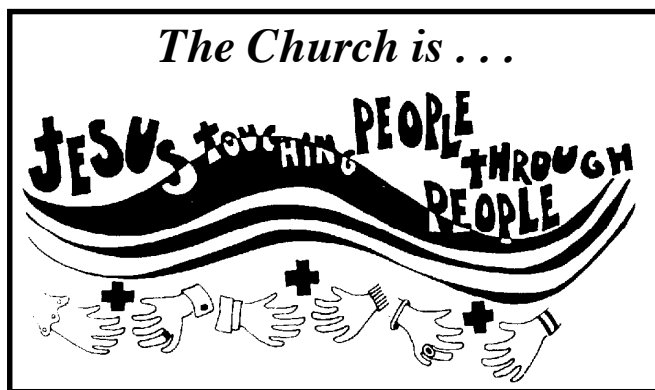
From these and other parts of the New Testament we see that far from being a voluntary group of individual believers who meet "for fellowship and teaching", the Church is the community of the risen Jesus, born in the Father's heart before the world was made, a supernatural reality spanning heaven and earth.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

S. Paul, as we have seen, calls the Church "the Body of Christ". This striking phrase means that Jesus and his Church form a single organism made up of many parts, of which he is the head. In fact, this organic union of Jesus and the Church is expressed in most of the Scripture passages listed above.

S. Augustine of Hippo (354-430AD) speaks of Jesus *"redeeming us by his blood, incorporating us with himself, making us his own members, that in him we also might be Christ . . . We all are in him both Christ's and Christ, since in some manner the whole Christ is the head and the Body."*

The Incarnation (or "enfleshing") of Jesus is the beginning of salvation. During his earthly ministry the grace of God flowed to people through the physical Body of Jesus. In the light of what the New Testament says it is not overstating things to say that Jesus remains incarnate on earth in his mystical Body, the Church (*"the fulness of him who fills all in all"*). This is how Jesus continues his work of saving, forgiving, healing, teaching, feeding and renewing the world today. This is how Jesus preaches the Gospel to the poor today, how he brings captives into liberty, and how he proclaims the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4:18).



BACK TO THE CREED

In the Creed we say at Mass every Sunday, the Church is described as ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, and APOSTOLIC. These are ancient ways of trying to capture the glory of God's Church in a form of words. Let's look at each of them.

The Church is ONE

When we were baptized we became members of the ONE Body of Christ, the Church. Think about these passages from the New Testament:

"For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." (1 Corinthians 8:6)

"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (1 Corinthians 10:17)

"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:13)

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:4)

Many of us today recognise that the divisions amongst Christians are not God's will, and have devoted ourselves to working for the unity of which we read in the prayer Jesus prayed the night before he died: *"... that they may all be one; even as you Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory which you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."* (John 17:21-23)

The Church is HOLY

"Holy" means "set apart" or "special". We use the word "holy" to describe God. And we use it to describe the Church as well. In other words, as we have already seen, the Church is not just a club or a human organization to which we belong. Because the Church is the BODY OF CHRIST, we regard her as a supernatural reality sharing God's very own life. She is holy. Think about the following passages:

"But as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'." (1 Peter 1:15-16)

"Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14)

"If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are." (1 Corinthians 3:17)

It is important to understand that the Church is not holy in the first instance because of the holiness of its members. It is holy because of its origin in God. Frederick Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1896 to 1902, put it this way:

"The Church takes its origin, not in the will of man but in the will of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . Everywhere men are called in to that which already exists; they are recognised as members when they are within; but their membership depends on their admission, and not upon their constituting themselves into a Body in the sight of the Lord. In the New Testament the Church flows out from the Lord; not flows into him."

Having said that, however, the Church DOES teach the importance of our growing in personal holiness, for Jesus said: *"You must be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."* (Matthew 5:48)

When others come into contact with the Church community, they should be able to sense the goodness and love of God. They should be able to tell that we are a people of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Church is CATHOLIC

The word "Catholic" comes from the Greek "Kath holos", "according to the whole". It means "universal", the whole faith for all people everywhere and in all times. In a special sense "Catholic" means the TRUE AND RIGHT TEACHING that has always been believed by the mainstream of the Church. The words "Catholic" and "Catholicism" refer to the ancient faith that comes to us from the Apostles.

There are three main streams in the Catholic Church. The largest is the Roman Catholic Church whose leader is the Bishop of Rome, the "Pope", the successor of S. Peter.

The next largest stream comprises the Orthodox Churches. They include the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Antiochian Orthodox Church and so on. There are many groups within Orthodoxy, and each of them has its own leader who is called a "Patriarch".

The Anglican Communion is the third and smallest stream of the Catholic Church. It is a collection of independent Churches descended from the Church of England.

The first task of the Catholic Church is to PROCLAIM THE GLORY AND MAJESTY OF GOD. This she does in worship.

Secondly, the Church is to TEACH THE FAITH found in the Scriptures and the Tradition that comes from the Apostles. The Bishops have the task of guarding the Faith from wrong teaching ("heresy").

Thirdly, the Church's task is to CARE FOR ALL WHO NEED GOD'S HELP.

Fourthly, the Church must be active in SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRIST at home and abroad. Jesus said: *"Go . . . therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."* (Matthew 28:19-20)

The Church is APOSTOLIC

"Apostolic" comes from the Greek "apostello" which means "I send". The Apostles were those special disciples whom Jesus sent into the world to preach, to baptize, to teach, to consecrate the Eucharist and to serve the Church with the authority of Jesus himself. Jesus said to the Apostles: *"As the Father sent me, so I send you"* (John 20:21)

But there is a sense in which the whole Church is apostolic. In other words, the Church is sent into the world to bear witness to the Good News of Jesus where we live, work and learn. We do this in the way we share our lives with others as well as by the words we say. Each one of us is sent by Jesus into the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to bring other people closer to

God. But there is more . . .

The Church is apostolic because she continues "in the apostles' *TEACHING* and the Apostles' *FELLOWSHIP*" (Acts 2:42) like the early Christians. The New Testament shows us that the Apostles shared their commission with others by ordaining them, or setting them apart, as bishops, presbyters ("priests") and deacons, with the laying on of hands (e.g. Acts 20:25-28, Titus 1:5).

Writing somewhere between 75 and 100 AD (i.e. while some of the Apostles were still alive), Clement, Bishop of Rome, says that the Apostles "appointed the bishops and afterwards provided a continuance that, if they should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministry."

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, writing about 100 AD says: "Be obedient to the bishop, as Jesus Christ was to the Father, and to the presbyterate, as to the Apostles. Have reverence for the deacons, as charged by God."

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (who was taught by Polycarp, a disciple of S. John), writing about 180 AD says: "We are able to enumerate those who were appointed Bishops in the Churches by the Apostles; and who are their successors up to our time."

Tertullian, born about 20 years later, says: "Let them unfold

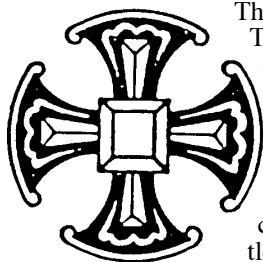
the roll of their Bishops, so coming down in succession from the beginning, that their first Bishop had for his ordainer or predecessor one of the Apostles, or Apostolic men; for in this manner do the Apostolic Churches reckon their origin. Just so can the rest also show those whom, being appointed by the Apostles to the Episcopate, they have as transmitters of the Apostolic seed."

To this day, if we want to see if a particular group of Christians is part of the Catholic Church founded by Jesus, we ask whether they preserve the *APOSTOLIC FAITH* (in contrast to more recent versions of Christianity) and the *APOSTOLIC MINISTRY* (in contrast to "man-made" arrangements that deny the necessity of bishops, priests and deacons in a direct line from the Apostles).

In other words, we would need to ask, "Do you have Bishops whose authority and ministry stretch back through the Apostolic Succession to Jesus himself?"

Introducing its Ordination services, our Church's Book of Common Prayer says: "It is evident unto all men diligently reading the holy Scripture and ancient Authors, that from the Apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministry in Christ's Church: Bishops, Priests and Deacons." It goes on to declare that our Church intends to "continue" these orders of ministry.

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH



The word "Anglican" means "English". The English Church ("*Ecclesia Anglicana*" / "*Church of England*") traces its roots right back to the earliest days of Christianity. The Christian faith reached England by the second century (some scholars believe that it was well before the end of the first century, during the lifetime of the Apostles).

The fact that English bishops were present at a Council of the whole Church held at Arles in Gaul (France) in 314 A.D. indicates that the Church in England was both organised and recognised by this time. It was also in full communion with the rest of the Catholic Church.

By the sixth century, the Church of England had been hampered by foreign invasions, and nearly wiped out.

But Christianity again spread throughout Britain as a result of great missionary saints, including S. Columba and S. Aidan in the North, S. Patrick in the West, S. Cedd in the East, S. Augustine in the South and S. Chad in the Midlands.

It was in 597 that S. Augustine arrived with a band of some forty monks, making his base at Canterbury where he became the first Archbishop. He was sent to England by Pope S. Gregory the Great, who had noticed 'Angle' children in the slave market of Rome and was saddened to learn that not all Angle people had heard the Good News of Christ.

S. Augustine's mission renewed and strengthened the English Church's relationship with Rome, a relationship that was to endure for nearly a thousand years.

In the 16th century, through the actions of King Henry VIII, the Church of England found herself cut off from the rest of the Catholic Church. She became an isolated island of faith. This period of great turmoil and breakup within the Church is strangely called the 'Reformation'.

While many other communities broke away from the Catholic Church in Europe and formed new groups, having rejected the Catholic Faith, priesthood and sacraments, the Anglican Church always claimed that it was, and continued to be, the Catholic Church in England.

It was natural that the English settlers in Australia would

bring their Church with them. From the time of the First Fleet there has been an Anglican presence in this country.

To this day the Anglican Church teaches that it has no faith of its own, no priesthood of its own, and no sacraments of its own - but only the faith, priesthood and sacraments of the Universal Catholic Church.

We do believe, however, that God is wanting to heal our broken relationship with the wider Catholic Church, of which we still claim to be an integral part. Indeed, we must pray that all Christians may once again be one family in Christ.

The 100th Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey visited Pope Paul VI in 1966. They signed a declaration committing the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion to

" . . . that goal which is Christ's will - the restoration of complete communion in faith and sacramental life".

When he visited Canterbury Cathedral in 1982, Pope John Paul II said:

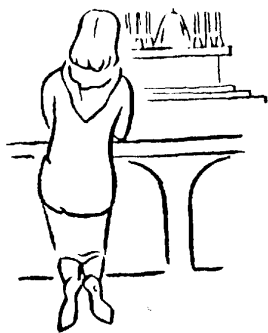
"I appeal to you in this holy place, all my fellow Christians, and especially the members of the Church of England and the members of the Anglican Communion throughout the world, to accept the commitment to which Archbishop Runcie [Archbishop of Canterbury] and I pledge ourselves anew before you today. This commitment is that of praying and working for reconciliation and ecclesial unity according to the mind and heart of our Saviour Jesus Christ."

In 1989, the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury signed this declaration expressing the same hope for Christian unity:

" . . . Against the background of human disunity, the arduous journey to Christian unity must be pursued with determination and vigour, whatever obstacles are perceived to block the path.

"We here solemnly re-commit ourselves and those we represent to the restoration of full ecclesial communion in the confidence that to seek anything less would be to betray our Lord's intention for the unity of his people."





Learning to Pray

“There is no life without prayer. Without prayer there is only madness and horror.”

- Vasilii Rozanov

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (James 4:8). It is for us to begin. If we take one step towards the Lord, he takes ten toward us - he who saw the prodigal son while he was yet at a distance, and had compassion and ran and embraced him.”

- Tito Colliander

There is only one way to understand a person and to get to know them. It is to spend time with them, to relax with them, to open oneself to them, to listen to them. Our life with God works the same way.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

It is, quite simply, our friendship with God, our daily relationship with him. It is to bring before him our worship, our hopes, our sins, and our fears. Prayer is both listening to God and speaking to him. It is sharing ourselves with him totally.

For us, prayer is essentially COMMUNAL. All Christian prayer, including our individual prayer life, is part of the Church's prayer to the Father. Unfortunately, a lot of people - praying people at that! - get this wrong. They succumb to an excessive individualism that in the long run causes havoc in the spiritual life. Note these words of Aleksei Khomiakov:

“No one is saved alone. He who is saved is saved in the Church as a member of her and in union with all her members. If anyone believes, he is in the communion of faith; if he loves, he is in the communion of love; if he prays, he is in the communion of prayer.”

And Father Alexander Elchaninov says:

“Ignorance and sin are characteristic of isolated individuals. Only in the unity of the Church do we find these defects overcome. Man finds his true self in the Church alone: not in the helplessness of spiritual isolation, but in the strength of his communion with his brothers and his Saviour.”

WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

Because prayer is being with God and conversing with him, we can and should pray at all times. Quite naturally, we will want to bring our needs to God and express our gratitude to him throughout the day. He wants us to face everything together with him.

But we should also give God ‘special time’ - prime time. This can be in the early morning, at lunchtime or before we go to sleep at night. Choose a time and stick to it as a daily discipline.

WHERE SHOULD WE PRAY?

We can pray anywhere, at work, at home, in the garden, taking the dog for a walk or while travelling, for Jesus is our companion and is always with us. But it may also be helpful to find a place of quiet where we can be totally alone with him. This can be an ordinary place, in a room at home, or somewhere special, like your parish church, before the Blessed Sacrament, or at a Shrine.

THE ADVENTURE OF BEING WITH GOD

Mother Mary Clare wrote:

“To stand before the living God, what an adventure; to stand face to face before the living God not in a vague way in a place we call heaven, but in the here and now of our moment to moment living, by, with and in Christ, as we are made part of his prayer and his offering through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

God has called us to be a people who live in close friendship with himself. Friendship involves communication and two way dialogue. It involves a posture of heart, an attitude toward the



***“Let my prayer
arise
before you
like incense.”***

(Psalm 141:2)



one who is loved. For us this posture of heart includes recognition of our heavenly Father's greatness, goodness, power and mercy. In prayer we think lovingly of him, we speak to him, we use gestures to express what is in our hearts, and we determine to do what he asks of us.

We can never understand prayer FULLY because it is an entering into the inner life of God, and a sharing in that life. But the things that God has revealed to us about his inner life help us to understand many things about prayer.

God's greatest revelation to us is THE BLESSED TRINITY - the knowledge that within the inner life of God there are three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God himself IS "Trinity" - a community of sharing, a community of love. In this relationship, the Son has always offered perfect prayer and praise to the Father. By the Holy Spirit we are drawn into this movement of love.

In Galatians 4:6 S. Paul says: *"The proof that you are sons (of God) is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts: the Spirit that cries, 'Abba, Father'."*

The cry "Abba, Father" spoken continually by the Spirit through us is basic to the Christian understanding of prayer.

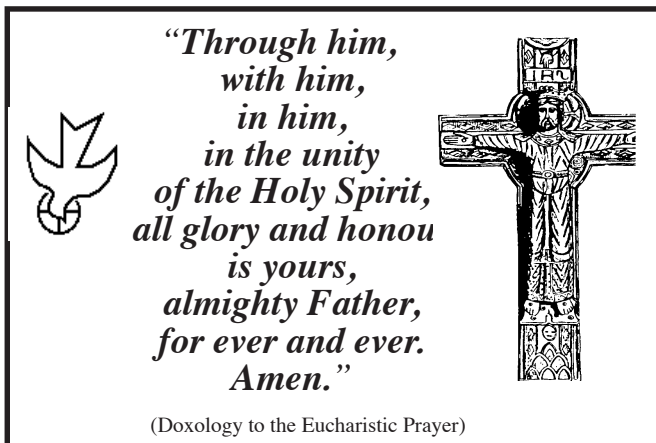
The heart of this sharing is the union of Jesus and his people in the Mass. To quote the Anglican-Roman Catholic Agreed Statement on the Eucharist, this is when we are *"caught up into the movement of his self offering"*.

In other words, it is overwhelmingly in the Mass we are made part of the prayer of Jesus, the essence of which is the eternal movement of love and self-giving between him and the Father.

The Letter to the Hebrews focuses on this by describing the faithful as a liturgical assembly joined to Jesus the great High Priest as he enters the heavenly sanctuary to offer worship to the Father. Speaking of Jesus, Hebrews 2:11-12 says: *"He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, 'I will proclaim thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee.'"*

The Holy Spirit has made us part of the prayer of Jesus and his Church. ALL our prayers, if they are to be of true value, must be small streams entering this great river of worship between Jesus, the Church and the Father.

This is what S. Jude means when he says that we should be always *"praying in the Holy Spirit."* (Jude 20).



MORE ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

Whereas many of the world's religious traditions stress man's efforts to find God, the emphasis of the Christian Faith is on GOD'S INITIATIVE. He is at work IN us, prodding and nudging, drawing us into a closer relationship with himself. Our part is to RESPOND to his love by allowing ourselves to be drawn into the eternal relationship of Jesus and the Father in the Holy Spirit.

This sense of prayer being God's work IN us lies behind S. Paul's advice against worrying when we don't know what to say in our prayers: *"... the Spirit helps us in our weakness: for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit ..."* (Romans 8:28)

The more open we are to the Holy Spirit's attempts to deepen our union with Jesus, the more meaningful our prayer becomes.

Something of the adventure of this is captured by Father Gonville Ffrench-Beytagh in his book A Glimpse of Glory:

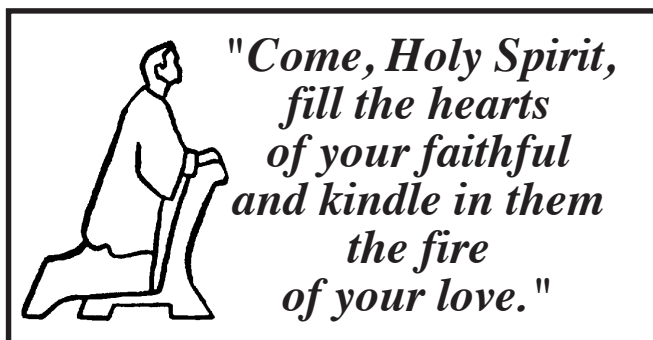
"The Holy Spirit is pouring, cascading forth, in tumultuous torrents of love pouring out into the Son, pouring himself in torrents of love. And the Son himself is joyously, gloriously, pouring back his love into the Father. In this great procession

of love pouring forth love, it is the Holy Spirit who is poured forth; it is he who is cascading forth in this glorious love affair. And that love is so unlimited, so limitless, that it spills over.

"The Holy Spirit spills over. This is not because God can't contain himself, but because he is so longing to share his life of love and joy and glory, that he has made us as containers. That is what CAPAX DEI means - capable of containing God. Our glory and our purpose is to be filled with the reality which is God. We are designed to be filled with the love of God. We are like the great tankers, filled with petrol or milk, that go trundling along the road, marked 'Capacity 20,000 gallons'. But you and I go about with a couple of gallons sloshing around in the bottom instead of being filled with the fullness of God. Yet that is what he made us for. That is the purpose of our existence - to be filled with God. If we think of prayer being for that, then we are expanding ourselves to receive a share of what is poured out and spilling over of the tremendous infinite power of the love of God.

"... I once spent four astonished days at the Victoria Falls in Africa. I was being pounded into the ground by their deafening roar and the magnificent sight of the millions and millions of gallons every moment pouring out, cascading, thundering down into the gorge below. It seemed as if the Congo and the Zambezi had drained all the water out of Africa and there it was. For me this made a picture of the ceaseless activity within the being of God himself. It was like the cascades of infinite divine love interflowing within the Godhead between the Father and the Son. God the Father is begetting love; God the Son is begotten love; God the Holy Spirit is the ceaseless flow of love between the Father and the Son. The Spirit binds them together in the gorgeous, ceaseless torrent of love.

"And beside the Victoria Falls is the rain forest. It is a weird place where you can put on a sou' wester, hat, oilskins, gumboots, and walk into the forest and you're just soaked to the skin. Water gets through everything. The heavy mist comes from the spray that rises up from the great canyon into which



the torrent flows. It penetrates everything and seems wetter than ordinary water. As the mist from the cascade will drench us and soak into us if we put ourselves there in the forest, so, if we put ourselves close to the Lord God, his love that overflows and overflows will soak us in the Spirit. We long to share his love in as far as it can be shared by human beings. And he has made us for that, he has made us to be CAPAX DEI, to stand, as it were, in the rain forest, to be drenched in the love of God. That is the spiritual life.

"... the Falls make a picture of this torrential love of God which never stops. We are caught up into God's love in the prayer of the Spirit praying within us. And we are caught up with the prayer of all the ages and the prayers of all the saints and of our own forbears. We are in their prayers with the angels and the archangels. It is the one great paean of love, agonizing sometimes, from the great chorus of heaven of which we are a part."

LIGHTING A CANDLE IS A SIGN

- * *a sign of our prayer and the offering of our lives;*
- * *a sign that at our baptism we passed from darkness into the light of Christ;*
- * *a reminder to us and to others of all the saints and martyrs who have shone as lights of the world, and who pray for us;*
- * *a witness to all who pass by that this is a place of prayer.*

(From a notice in Canterbury Cathedral)



WHAT WORDS?

Because prayer is essentially "being with God", it does not consist primarily in the words we say.

Words are important, though, especially in the communal prayer of the Church. And some words have been hallowed by centuries of use. They are almost like the "mantras" of the Christian tradition.

But sometimes people argue about whether set prayers or "spontaneous" prayers are best. There are some who believe that always being spontaneous is a sign of closeness to God; there are others who would never dream of departing from the set words of a prayer book.

Set prayers are important, especially in public worship. Ancient and beautiful liturgical forms, used by the Church down through the centuries, act as a framework for the offering of the community. But in private prayer there are no hard and fast rules. It is a matter of what is appropriate and meaningful for us personally. What is appropriate for us varies at different points in our spiritual journeys.

Most followers of Jesus find that the best way of praying is to use a mixture of spontaneous and set prayers, remembering that the words are not the prayer . . . they merely clothe it.

Father Robert Llewelyn uses a different image to say the same thing when he speaks about the value of the Rosary and other traditional set prayers: *"The important thing is that the intention to pray remains, ourselves meanwhile attending gently to the words as the Holy Spirit enables us, knowing that the heart is at prayer even though the mind may wander from time to time. We have to remember that the real prayer lies beyond the words in the inclination and the offering of the heart, and the function of the words is to set the heart free to pray. The words may be seen as banks of a river enabling it to remain deep and flowing. Without the banks, the waters would scatter and become shallow and even stagnant. A similar danger is open to*

prayer when the framework in which it freely flows is removed. Yet the prayer is not the framework, but lies beyond. And just as when the river flows into the sea, the banks are left behind, so when prayer flows more deeply into God, the words, having served their purpose, will drop away."

"ACTS"

There are times when our prayers become unbalanced. Perhaps all our time is spent asking God for things. Or perhaps we never seem to pray for others. Many people have found this "ACTS" four point plan of prayer a helpful way of making sure things are in their right perspective.

A: ADORATION

Saying to God "I love you".

We respond to God's love in words of praise and worship. (Psalm 150)

C: CONFESSION

Saying to God "I'm sorry".

We bring to God our mistakes and failings and ask forgiveness. (Psalm 51)

T: THANKSGIVING

Saying to God "Thank you".

We thank God for his physical gifts like the creation that we enjoy, our family and friends, and for his spiritual gifts of forgiveness and peace. (Psalm 25)

S: SUPPLICATION

Saying to God "Please . . ."

We entrust to God our personal needs, the needs of our Church, the needs of the world, the needs of our friends. Praying for others is "intercession". (Psalm 25)

PRACTICAL HELPS:

As we have already said, there are different ways of praying and each of us has to find the way that suits us best. We must pray as we can not as we can't! However there are many aids to prayer that may help us, such as:

- * reading Scripture
- * saying the Rosary
- * lighting a candle
- * saying the Jesus Prayer
- * saying the Daily Office
- * going on retreat
- * praying before Icons
- * using a prayer book
- * going on pilgrimage to a Shrine
- * making a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament

*Come now, little man!
Flee for a while from your tasks,
hide yourself for a little space
from the turmoil of your thoughts.
Come, cast aside your burdensome cares,
and put aside your laborious pursuits.
Give your time to God,
and rest in him for a little while.
Enter into the inner chamber of your mind,
shut out all things save God,
and, having barred the door of your chamber,
seek him.*

- S. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109

SILENCE

Many people down through the ages have found silence to be the most effective praying that there is. In the midst of our turmoil we ask the Holy Spirit to calm our hearts and minds so that we can be still before God. Fr. David Rosage says:

"Silence is not merely the abstention from verbal communication. There must also be the silence of the heart . . . Our subconscious mind is our memory computer. There, also, we house our habit-patterns. Each day our subconscious is bombarded with countless sensory images. This accentuates the importance of silence. Silence is making room for God in our lives. In silence God comes to us and clears away much of the debris blocking his way. God's presence is interiorized. We sit at his feet like Mary, listening, just listening. God then talks to us as to a friend. The prayer of listening can be compared to parking a car. It is not enough simply to drive the car into a parking space; we must also turn off the motor. Prayer is not merely pausing, but also relaxing in silence in order to hear God speaking to our hearts."

Making time to be silent with God moves us beyond words. Sometimes we are even moved beyond "listening", as we allow the sense of just "being with God" seep into every level of our consciousness. We come to know a mystical "oneness" with him even for a split second of our praying. We gaze out on eternity, knowing that our life is mysteriously entangled with the eternal God who is love.

Each of us should create time and space for this kind of intimate silence in our friendship with God.

PRAYER IS SOMETIMES A STRUGGLE

When you find it difficult to pray, don't give up. We know from their writings that most of the great Saints and spiritual guides down through the centuries experienced times of struggle and frustration in prayer. From their lives we learn that whatever physical, emotional, intellectual or spiritual blockages may be in our way, God's love can - and will - conquer all! Our part is to persevere, especially in times of spiritual dryness. A Dutch Blessed Sacrament Father has written:

*Sometimes you will taste and see how good the Lord is.
Be glad then, and give him all honour,
because his goodness to you has no measure.
Sometimes you will be dry and joyless
like parched land or an empty well.
But your thirst and helplessness will be your best prayer
if you accept them with patience
and embrace them lovingly.*

*Sometimes your prayer will be an experience
of the infinite distance
that separates you from God;
sometimes your being and his fullness
will flow into each other.*

*Sometimes you will be able to pray
only with your body and hands and eyes;
sometimes your prayer will move
beyond words and images;
sometimes you will be able
to leave everything behind you
to concentrate on God and his Word.*

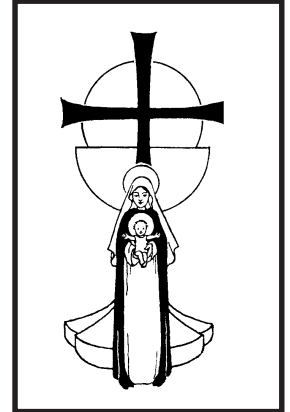
*Sometimes you will be able to do nothing else
but take your whole life and everything in you
and bring them to God.
Every hour has its own possibilities
of genuine prayer.*

WE NEVER PRAY ALONE

In the Christian world view, reality is all one piece, and heaven is all around us. Heaven is the invisible world of which we speak when we recite the Creed at Sunday Mass, that "great cloud of witnesses" surrounding us, cheering us on as we look to Jesus and run the race that is set before us (see Hebrews 12:1-2).

This is part of what we mean by "the Communion of Saints", our oneness in Christ with the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the Saints and angels in the heavenly sphere. Even when we are alone, we are surrounded by their love and prayers. When we pray, we pray with them, and we share with them in the love of God.

We greatly value the prayers of those Christian friends on earth who are especially close to Jesus. How much more eagerly should we seek the prayers of those who are with our Lord in glory? After all, belonging to the Church is a living experience, not just of God, but of all the other members of the family. The whole Church is knit together in love, and nurtured by prayer. Nothing - not even death - can destroy that!



GETTING HELP

It is important to ask those who have been on the journey a little longer for help and guidance when it comes to praying. Because of potential problems, struggles and pitfalls, you should talk to your priest about your spiritual journey. He might suggest that you meet periodically with him or with another priest or a lay person who has a special gift in the ministry of "spiritual direction". It can be a big help to confide in a spiritual guide on a regular basis.

THREE PRAYERS TO LEARN:

The Our Father:

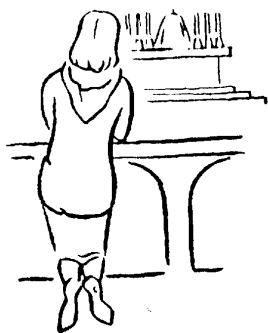
Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

The Hail Mary:

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.

In Honour of the Blessed Sacrament:

Blessed, praised and adored be Jesus Christ
on his throne of glory.
And in the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar.



Meeting Jesus in the Sacraments 1

GOD COMES TO US IN TANGIBLE WAYS

The Bible tells us that when God created the physical universe he “*saw that it was good*” (Genesis 1:31). In other words, matter is intrinsically holy. It is important to assert this, because there are some religious people who see the created order in negative terms.

Furthermore, Christians have always believed that because of his love for us, God entered this world of matter through the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. He joined himself to the atoms and molecules of the created order, the physical universe, revealing himself in a visible and tangible way. The Apostle John puts it like this:

*“Something which has existed from the beginning
that we have heard;
we have seen with our own eyes;
that we have watched
and touched with our hands;
the Word, who is life - this is our subject.
That life was made visible:
we saw it and we are giving our testimony -
telling you of the eternal life
which was with the Father
and now has been made visible to us”.*
(1 John 1:1-2)

At the heart of the Christian Faith is the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is “God in the Flesh”, the physical revelation of God’s life.

We are *physical* beings, and as such we communicate with each other in tangible, physical ways. We give gifts to express our love, and even as a way of saying “sorry”. Shaking hands is an outward physical sign that conveys peace and goodwill; embracing one another indicates friendship; sexual intercourse enacts the love of husband and wife, and communicates that love. We use all sorts of tangible, physical expressions in the range of our relationships with others.

Through the physical actions of Jesus, God reached out and encountered men and women. They received his blessing and love; they were made whole.

Jesus no longer reaches out and touches people in what we might call his *historical* body, because he is no longer present

in that way. But he *is* present through his *mystical* body, the Church (see Ephesians 1:23, and 1 Corinthians 12:27). Through the *physical* actions of his mystical body, he continues to encounter people today.

These “actions” are called *sacraments*.

"TANGIBLE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE RISEN JESUS"



A sacrament may be described as a *tangible encounter with the risen Jesus*. By *tangible* we mean in a way that involves our senses. And by *encounter* we mean a meeting in which Jesus communicates with us personally - just as he did with people in Gospel times.

There are *seven* sacraments, special moments when the risen Jesus acts through the community of his followers to share his life with us.

The sacraments are channels of his love and power, through which he forgives us, renews us and equips us. Through them he pours his risen life into our waiting hearts. Each sacrament has its own physical or material side, its *outward sign*, which assures us that Jesus really is touching our lives.



“Upon the Cross the God-Man intended his act of redemption for all without exception. The sacrifice of the Cross, in all its eternal-actuality in mystery, is still intended for all people, for each one personally. Now it is this personal intention of Christ’s act of redemption for a particular human being that is brought out in the sacraments . . .

“As the personal redemptive act of Christ in his Church, a sacrament is therefore the personal approach of Christ to a particular human being. In the fullest sense of the word, a sacrament is the pledge of Christ’s availability to a particular individual; the tangible pledge of his willing readiness to enter upon an encounter.”

(Edward Schillebeeckx in *Christ the Sacrament of Encounter with God*)

THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

	HOW JESUS TOUCHES US The "Outward Sign"	WHAT JESUS DOES FOR US The "Inward Grace"
BAPTISM	Water is poured on us in the name of the Trinity	Jesus joins us to his dying and rising, our sins are washed away, we are "born again" into his Church.
CONFIRMATION	The laying on of the Bishop's hand, and anointing with the holy oil of Chrism	Jesus completes our baptism by giving us the Holy Spirit.
HOLY COMMUNION	Bread and Wine that have been consecrated and offered to God are given to us to eat.	Jesus nourishes us with his body and blood, deepening and nurturing our union with him and with one another
RECONCILIATION	We confess our sins, and the priest speaks the words of forgiveness ("absolution").	Jesus forgives us, and frees us from our sins, reconciling us to the Father and to the Church.
MARRIAGE	The union of a man and woman blessed by the Church.	Jesus joins their lives together, and helps them to be faithful to each other until death.
HOLY ORDER	The laying on of the Bishop's hands.	Jesus makes the candidate a deacon, priest, or bishop, continuing the ministry of the apostles.
ANOINTING OF THE SICK	Anointing on the forehead and hands with holy oil.	Jesus gives healing to the sick and strength to the dying.

MEETING JESUS IN BAPTISM

As we have already seen, Jesus welcomes us into his holy people, the Church in the sacrament of baptism. The water of baptism speaks powerfully to us of the gift of new life, for just as we use water to refresh and cleanse us, so in baptism Jesus washes us and pours into us his renewing power. Because baptism unites us to him, we are marked out forever as his people with the sign of the cross.



"When the Church baptizes, it is Christ himself who baptizes."
- S. Augustine of Hippo (354-430AD)

The prayer that is often used for the blessing of the water helps us to appreciate water as a sign of new life:

Father, you give us grace through sacramental signs which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power. In baptism we use your gift of water, which you have made a rich symbol of the grace you give us in this sacrament.

At the very dawn of creation your Spirit breathed on the waters, making them the wellspring of all holiness. (1)

The waters of the great flood you made a sign of the waters of baptism, that make an end of sin and a new beginning of goodness. (2)

Through the waters of the Red Sea you led Israel out of slavery, to be an image of your holy people, set free from sin by baptism. (3)

In the waters of the Jordan your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Spirit. (4)

Your Son willed that water and blood should flow from his side as he hung upon the cross. (5)

After his resurrection he told his disciples: "Go out and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." (6)

Father, look with love upon your Church, and unseal for her the fountain of baptism. By the power of the Spirit give to the water of this font the grace of your Son. You created man in your own likeness: cleanse him from sin (7) in a new birth (8) to innocence by water and the Spirit.

We ask you, Father, with your Son, to send the Holy Spirit upon the water of this font. May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism rise also with him to newness of life (9). We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES: (1) Genesis 1:1-3; (2) Genesis 5-6; (3) Exodus 12-14; (4) Matthew 3; (5) John 19:34; (6) Matthew 28:18-20; (7) Acts 22:16; (8) John 3:5; (9) Romans 6:4.

The Old Testament references to water in the above prayer are important because they form the backdrop to the Church's understanding of Baptism.

Another passage that ought to be mentioned is Ezekiel 47:1-12, a prophecy which pictures God's healing and renewing power flowing like a river from the Temple.



WHAT DOES JESUS DO FOR US IN BAPTISM?

1. In Baptism Jesus joins us to his dying and rising

S. Paul wrote to the early Roman Christians: *"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."* (Romans 6:3-4)

He also said to the Colossians: *"... you have come to fullness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ... you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead ... God made alive together with him ..."* (Colossians 2:11-13)



When the Church baptises at the Easter Vigil, she emphasises the connection between the rising of Jesus and our own resurrection to new life in the sacrament of Baptism.

2. In Baptism Jesus gives us a new birth

We remember that Jesus said we are *"born again by water and the Spirit."* (John 3:5)

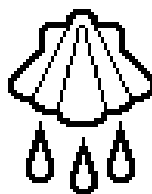
At the end of the Baptism service in the Book of Common Prayer, the priest says to the parents and Godparents, *"Seeing now that this child is regenerate ..."* So, properly understood, a "born again Christian" is someone who has been baptized in the name of the Trinity. We ought to be very careful not to accept the ideas of people who deny this truth and who tell us that being "born again" is some extra kind of personal and emotional experience!

3. In Baptism Jesus cleanses us from sin

When the Apostle Paul was converted and arrived in Damascus, Ananias said to him: *"And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name."* (Acts 22:16)

S. Peter says: *"Baptism ... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 3:21)

S. Paul said to the Ephesians: *"... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with a form of words."* (Ephesians 5:26-27)



At Mass on Sundays we declare our belief *"... in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins."* (Nicene Creed)

In addition to being cleansed from sin, the words of the exorcism prayer make it clear that in Baptism we are being set apart for a lifelong struggle against sin and evil

4. In Baptism Jesus makes us members of his body, the Church

When we are baptized we begin to live as part of the Body of Christ. S. Paul says:

"... just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

And as we have seen already, Jesus sent his Apostles out to make people members of his Church by baptising them. He said:

"... Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Being part of the Church, the body of Christ, we share in the priestly ministry of Jesus. In the First Letter of S. Peter (which Biblical scholars regard as a tract on the meaning of Baptism) we read these powerful words:

"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10)

This does not deny the reality of the "ministerial priesthood", which is a distinct sacramental ministry. But it does remind us that *the whole Church has a priestly nature*.

The priesthood of the baptised was emphasised in the early centuries when after the first part of the Mass (the readings, the sermon and the prayers), the unbaptised would be sent out so as not to be present for the offering of the sacrifice of the Eucharist. They could stay only after becoming part of the "priestly people of God" through Baptism, because it was only then that they were able to assist in the offering.

As baptised people we exercise the ministry of our priesthood by:

- * being present as often as possible to assist in the offering of the holy sacrifice of the Mass.
- * praying for other people
- * sharing our faith with others
- * giving to those in need
- * fulfilling ministries in the Church (reading, serving, teaching, caring)

THOSE OTHER CEREMONIES

Following the actual baptism, some ancient ceremonies take place which help us to appreciate what God does for us in this sacrament:

Anointing with the holy oil of Chrism

This reminds us that in Baptism we become part of the priestly people. It is a sign of being consecrated to God in Christ.

Giving of the lighted candle

This is a sign that in baptism we receive the light of Christ and are charged with the responsibility of taking it to others.

Clothing with the white garment

This symbolises the fact that in baptism we put on the righteousness of Christ.

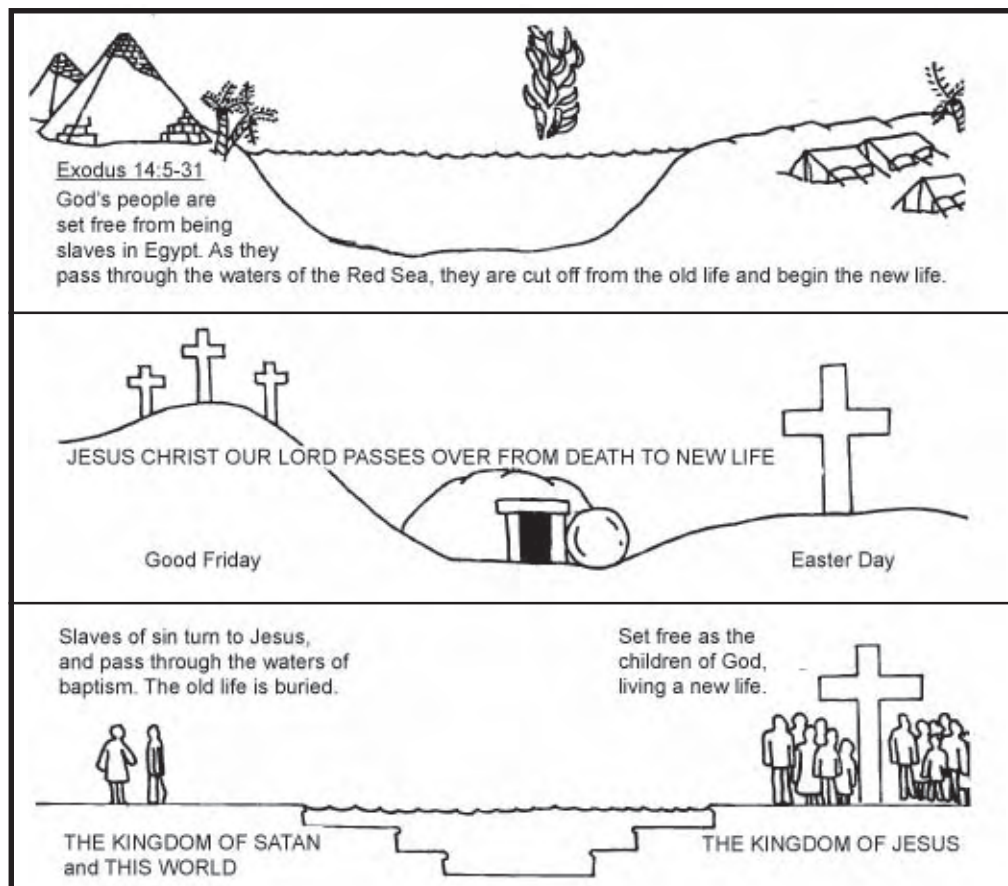
Prayer over the ears and the mouth

In the baptism of children the celebrant asks that the child will grow up hearing the Word of God, and then profess the Faith with their own lips as they grow older.

"Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift . . . We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift. It is called GIFT because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; GRACE since it is given to the guilty; BAPTISM because sin is buried in the water; ANOINTING for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; ENLIGHTENMENT because it radiates light; CLOTHING since it veils our shame; BATH because it washes; and SEAL as it is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship."

- S. Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389AD)

From death to new life . . .



"You were led down to the font of holy baptism just as Christ was taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb."

You were plunged into the water . . .

It was night for you and you could not see.

But when you rose again, it was like coming into broad daylight.

In the same instant you died and were born again; the saving water was both a tomb and a womb."

- Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 350 AD)



Meeting Jesus in the Sacraments 2

THE MASS - A MYSTERY OF LOVE

The Mass, the Eucharist, the Breaking of Bread - whatever you like to call it - is like the love one person has for another . . . it is more for experiencing than for analysing. It is THE mystery of our faith. It is the living proof of God's love for us, and it is the Church's "thank you" to God for that love. It is the action in which the story of Jesus and our stories continually intersect.

But when we go to Mass, is this what we expect? Or do we focus on a cold church, crying children, a bad sound system, poor music or even a boring sermon? It depends what we are looking for.

The Mass can be a celebration with guitars under a tree at a youth camp, or an elaborate liturgy in a great cathedral embellished with the music of Mozart. Whatever cultural forms may be used, Christians everywhere go to Mass in order to be part of the mystery of God's love for us presented in a new and everlasting covenant.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The Mass began simply enough during the course of a Jewish festival which Jesus and his apostles were celebrating. This was the PASSOVER. Each year that Jewish people celebrated their ancestors' "passing over" from slavery under the Egyptians to freedom as the people of God. During the course of a special meal on the night before he died, Jesus took some bread, blessed it and broke it. Then he said:

*"This is my body which is broken for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."*

In the same way also the cup, after supper saying,

*"This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

(1 Corinthians 11:24-25)



S. Paul, who handed on what he had been taught by those who were there, goes on to say:

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (verse 26)

From the earliest days of the Church, those who had become followers of Jesus through baptism met regularly to listen to the teaching of the Apostles and to celebrate the Mass.

This was especially so on the first day of the week (the "Lord's Day") when they honoured the Lord's resurrection. (See Acts 2:42, Acts 20:2, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

They believed that in the Mass the risen Jesus came into their midst to renew their union with him.

A VERY SPECIAL MEAL

It is most significant that the main gathering of Christians is a meal, albeit a symbolic sort of meal. The sharing of food is one of the oldest ways of showing friendship. The one place a family is bound to meet, at least occasionally during the week, is around the table. Friends invite one another to dine together. The really important moments in our lives are generally marked by a feast of some kind. This is true even in civic life in which visiting statesmen are invited to banquets.

Gathering together at the Lord's Table for Mass, we share in a "sacred banquet" with the Lord Jesus and with our brothers and sisters in God's special family, the Church.



The food we receive, however, is very special.

When Jesus himself first tried to explain what kind of food he was going to give his followers, most of them shook their heads in disbelief and walked away! This is what he had said:

*"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.
I tell you most solemnly,
if you do not eat my flesh and drink my blood
you will not have life in you.
Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood
has eternal life,
and I shall raise him up on the last day.
For my flesh is real food
and my blood is real drink.
He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood
lives in me and I live in him"*
(John 6:51, 53-56)



It is easy to see why so many found the teaching of Jesus so hard to accept . . . and why it is still difficult for some today.

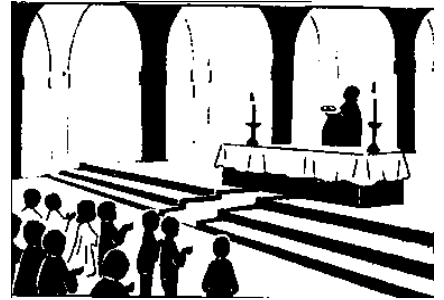
Yet at the Last Supper (the first Mass), Jesus gave us bread and wine and, in doing so, he did NOT say "this is symbolic of my body and blood". No, he says quite simply "this *IS* my Body and Blood".

The first human reaction is perhaps to say "ugh!" as thoughts of cannibalism spring to mind. In fact, cannibalism was one of the charges brought against the early Christians as a result of their use of this kind of language. And many of the deepest divisions amongst Christians down

through the centuries have been over what Jesus actually did mean.

The Church has always held that Jesus meant what he said: that at Mass, bread and wine become his body and blood. This is the MYSTERY of our Faith. These words, attributed to Queen Elizabeth 1, sum up the traditional Anglican attitude:

*Christ was the Word that spake it;
He took the bread and break it;
And what that Word did make it;
That I believe and take it.*



Anglicans have always been reluctant to debate the various theories that try to explain *how* bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Indeed, that reluctance is now common amongst other Christians, as we see in the much quoted footnote of the joint Anglican-Roman Catholic statement on the Eucharist, published in 1971: "*God acting in the eucharist effects a change in the inner reality of the elements*". The central issue is "*the FACT of Christ's presence and of the mysterious and radical change which takes place*" and not "*HOW the change takes place*".

We honour the sacramental presence of Jesus veiled beneath the appearance of bread and wine on our altars with music, ceremonial, incense, bells, and prayers of devotion. We GENUFLECT (bend the right knee) towards the body and blood of Christ, which we sometimes call "*THE BLESSED SACRAMENT*".

Furthermore, when we receive the body and blood of the risen Christ in Holy Communion, we renew our communion with him at the deepest possible level this side of the grave, and through him we are in communion with the whole Church, past and present. We are "*one body, one spirit in Christ*".

THE MASS IS THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS

Christians believe that there is another level on which this "mystery of faith" operates, that through the Mass we share in the work of Christ and identify with him.

Writing to some early Christians, S. John says:

"God's love for us was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son so that we could have life through him; this is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us when he sent his only Son TO BE THE SACRIFICE THAT TAKES OUR SINS AWAY." (1 John 4:9-10)

The word SACRIFICE means "a gift we offer to God".

In ordinary human friendships, gifts are given . . .

- * to express our love
- * to say "thank you"
- * to praise the other person's greatness
- * to make up for doing something wrong or hurtful

From the earliest days of the human race people have wanted to show their love for God by offering gifts to him. They have wanted to give him thanks. They have wanted to praise his greatness. And they have wanted to make up for their sins. In many cultures, and especially in Old Testament Israel, elaborate sacrificial systems developed. People gave some of their crops and animals to God. They brought these gifts to the priests, whose job it was to offer them, usually by burning them on a heap of stones that came to be called "the altar". The smoke ascended to God as a sign that the gifts no longer belonged to the worshipper but to God himself.



All these sacrifices could NEVER make up for our sins. Nor were they fitting gifts of love. In fact, Christians see them merely as signposts pointing to the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus is called the LAMB OF GOD because he is the perfect sacrifice.

His sacrifice included his life of perfect obedience to God the Father, and it culminated in his death on the cross when he offered himself to the Father to make up for the sins of all people. This was the best gift that had ever been offered to God . . . the gift of his own Son. As Jesus hung upon the cross, as he passed through that final curtain of death and then revealed the resurrection, the relationship ("covenant") between God and humankind was restored.

The Mass is the way that Jesus made for us to offer this perfect gift to the Father until the end of time. In the Mass, the Holy Spirit joins us to Jesus as he gives perfect praise and worship to God the Father.

Because of the limitations of time and place, we could not all be present on that first Good Friday as Jesus hung on the cross. So THE MASS BREAKS THROUGH THE TIME BARRIER AND MAKES THAT MOMENT PRESENT HERE AND NOW. The Mass is not *another* sacrifice or a *repetition* of Calvary; it is exactly the *same* sacrifice that Jesus offered to his Father on the Cross.

This is the meaning of our Lord's command "*Do this in remembrance of me*" (better translated "*do this for my memorial*"). The word "memorial" in the Greek is "*anamnesis*" which "*is almost untranslatable . . . it signifies the bringing of that person into the realm of the here and now*" (Bishop David Silk). In the Mass, the sacrifice of Jesus, his self-offering,

becomes present to us, so that we can participate in it.

As the Third Eucharistic Prayer for Children says:
*"Jesus died and rose again to save the world.
 He put himself into our hands,
 to be the sacrifice we offer you."*

THE MASS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN

This theme of timelessness is reflected in Revelation 13:8 where Jesus is described as "*the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world*", and also Chapter Five of Revelation, where Jesus, though risen, ascended and glorified is still revealed as the "*Lamb who was slain*" in the context of heaven's worship.

The Church has always believed that the Mass is THE GATE OF HEAVEN, that the timelessness of our Lord's sacrifice joins us to the worship that constantly takes place in the heavenly sphere.

This old-fashioned picture of the Mass, tries to express that by including the priest, the servers, and the congregation as well as the angels and saints adoring Jesus the Lamb of God. On either side of the altar are those who have recently died.

Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us that on our faith journey we are surrounded by a great "*cloud of witnesses*", while in verses 22-24 we read these words about the gathered Church:

"You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, where the millions of angels have gathered for the festival, with the whole Church in which everyone is a 'first-born son' and a citizen of heaven. You have come to God himself, the supreme Judge, and been placed with the spirits of the saints who have been made perfect; and to Jesus, the mediator who brings a new covenant . . ."

That is why the priest often sings or says these or similar words as we reach the heart of the Mass:

*"Therefore, with angels and archangels,
 and with all the company of heaven,
 we proclaim your great and glorious name,
 forever praising you, and saying. . ."*

and we all join in the heavenly song of praise:

*"Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
 heaven and earth are full of your glory,
 hosanna in the highest.
 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,
 Hosanna in the highest."*

Because the Mass is our participation in the heavenly worship, it is there that we become most aware of the blurring of the



boundaries between the two worlds. In the eternity of Christ's sacrifice, the veil is parted and we gaze through heaven's door into the world of God, the angels, the saints and those of our family and friends "*to whom we love but no longer see.*" For many people, it is only this understanding of the Mass that enables them to catch a vision of earth, too, being full of the glory of God.

OTHER NAMES

People sometimes use one of these other names for the Mass:

- * The Holy Eucharist ("*Eucharist*" is Greek for "*thanksgiving*")
- * Holy Communion
- * The Holy Sacrifice
- * The Divine Liturgy
- * The Holy Mysteries
- * The Lord's Supper

***The Eucharist is the completion of all the sacraments,
 and not simply one of them . . .***

All human striving reaches here its ultimate goal.

***For in this sacrament we attain God himself,
 and God himself is made one with us
 in the most perfect of all unions . . .***

***This is the final mystery;
 beyond this it is not possible to go,
 nor can anything be added to it.***

(Nicholas Cabasilas (1320 - 1371) Byzantine mystical writer)

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE GO?

The Church has always taught that we should attend Mass at least EVERY SUNDAY, unless prevented by sickness or other genuinely urgent circumstances. (Our absence robs God of glory, and helps to destroy our Parish's celebration of the Lord's resurrection; it weakens us spiritually and shrinks our vision of reality.)

In addition, the Anglican Church requires her members to receive Holy Communion at least 3 times a year, one of which must be Easter Day.

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

(Hebrews 10:23-25)

PREPARING FOR HOLY COMMUNION

If we were expecting an important guest, we would go to some trouble cleaning up and making everything ready. Perhaps we would cook a special meal. How much more should we prepare ourselves for Jesus who comes to us in Holy Communion! Read S. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.

The best way to prepare for the coming of Jesus is to do these things:

1. On the night before going to Mass

- * we think about our sins, and ask God to forgive us, perhaps using the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- * we make sure that as far as possible, we are at peace with others.
- * we think of someone for whom we will particularly pray at Mass (this is called our "intention").
- * we spend a little time being quiet and still with God.

2. Before Mass begins

- * we show special honour to Jesus by not eating or drinking anything for at least an hour before receiving Holy Communion.
- * we arrive at church early so as to spend time in silent prayer before Mass begins.

REMEMBER . . .

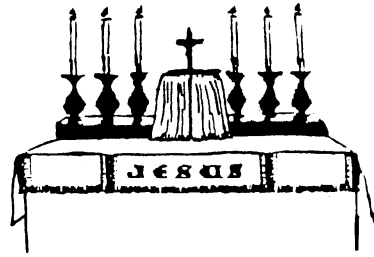
Every Mass is another Christmas

The stable is the Altar, for here Jesus comes to us. The crib is the Tabernacle in which Jesus lies for us to adore.

Every Mass is another Easter

The sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross is made real for us, and we receive his risen life in Holy Communion.

THE TABERNACLE



In the Parish Church, you will see a box at the focal point of the sanctuary. It is usually covered with a white or gold veil. This is a locking fire-proof safe called THE TABERNACLE.

Here, after Mass on Sundays, the priest places some of the Blessed Sacrament, the Body of Christ, to be kept all week. A white light is burning and the veil is drawn as signs of the sacramental presence of Jesus.

It is proper to reverence the sacramental presence of Jesus by GENUFLECTING (going down on the right knee) as we come into church, as we leave, and whenever we pass in front of the Tabernacle.

Jesus dwells with us in this special way for two reasons:

1. For those who cannot come to Mass

Jesus is ready at any hour of the day or night to be taken to the shut-in, the sick or the dying, so that they might be able to receive Holy Communion.

2. To receive our love and prayers

The sacramental presence of the risen Jesus in the Tabernacle makes our church building a special place for prayer. Jesus waits for us to come near. People come into the church from time to time, and pray, focussing the attention of their hearts on the mystery of Jesus truly present in the Blessed Sacrament.

"Benediction" is the special service we have when we kneel together before the presence of Jesus, singing hymns and praying to him. The climax of this little service is when the priest makes the sign of the cross over us with the holy Sacrament before putting it back in the Tabernacle.

THE SACRIFICE OF THE AGES

"Was ever another command so obeyed?

For century after century,
spreading slowly to every continent and country
and among every race on earth,
this action has been done,
in every conceivable human circumstance
for every conceivable human need
from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it,
from the pinnacles of earthly greatness
to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth.
Men have found no better thing than this to do
for kings at their crowning
and for criminals going to the scaffold;
for armies in triumph
or for a bride and bridegroom in a little country church;
for the proclamation of a dogma
or for a good crop of wheat;
for the wisdom of the Parliament of a mighty nation
or for a sick old woman afraid to die;
for a schoolboy sitting an examination
or for Columbus setting out to discover America;
for the famine of whole provinces
or for the soul of a dead lover;
in thankfulness because my father did not die of pneumonia;
for a village headman much tempted to return to fetish
because the yams had failed;



because the Turk was at the gates of Vienna;
for the repentance of Margaret;
for the settlement of a strike;
for a son for a barren woman;
for Captain so-and-so, wounded and prisoner of war;
while the lions roared in the nearby amphitheatre;
on the beach at Dunkirk;
while the hiss of scythes in the thick June grass
came faintly through the windows of the church;
tremulously, by an old monk
on the fiftieth anniversary of his vows;
furtively, by an exiled bishop who had hewn timber
all day in a prison camp near Murmansk;
gorgeously, for the canonisation of S. Joan of Arc
- one could fill many pages with the reasons
why men have done this,
and not tell a hundredth part of them.
And best of all, week by week and month by month,
on a hundred thousand successive Sundays,
faithfully, unfailingly,
across all the parishes of Christendom,
the pastors have done this
just to make the plebs sancta Dei
- the holy common people of God.

(Dom Gregory Dix in "The Shape of the Liturgy")



Meeting Jesus in the Sacraments 3

MEETING JESUS IN THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

When we were baptized, we became part of God's community of love, the Church. We became new people. S. Paul says: "When anyone is joined to Christ he is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come." (1 Corinthians 5:17)

But even as baptized people we remain fragile human beings. Sometimes we forget our first love for God; sometimes we break off our relationship with him altogether. We then stand in need of forgiveness and healing.

When you think about it, every group that we join, every skill that we learn, has built-in ways of fixing things up when they go wrong. If we start knitting, we have to learn what to do when a stitch is dropped. If we start playing golf, we have to learn how to get out of a sand bunker.

And so, the Sacrament of Reconciliation (or "going to Confession") is a meeting with Jesus in which he extends forgiveness and healing to us for sins committed after Baptism. We meet him at the cross, where he is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world".

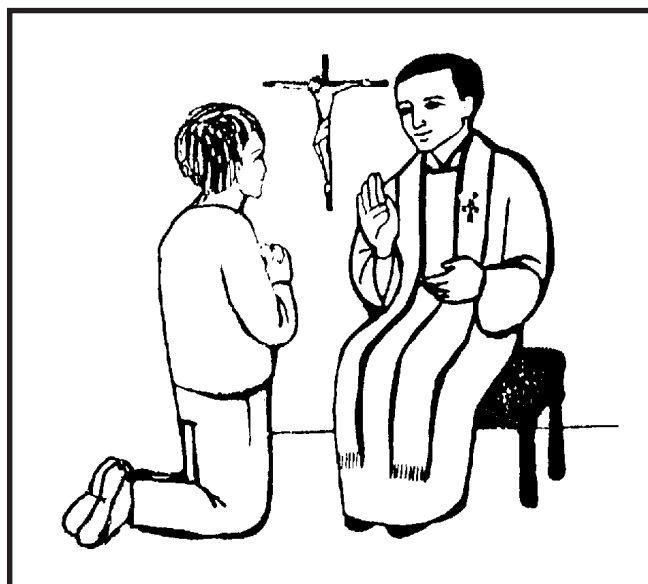
After he had risen from the dead, Jesus gave to the apostles his authority to release people from their sins. In S. John's Gospel we read:

*Jesus said:
"Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."
And when he had said this, he breathed on them,
and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit.
If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven;
if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
(John 20:19-21)*

These words are incorporated in the prayer which is used for the ordination of priests in the Anglican Church. As the bishop lays hands on the ordinand, he says:



"Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"
- Jesus to the apostles.



*"Receive the Holy Ghost
for the Office and Work of a Priest in the Church of God,
now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our hands.
Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven;
and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.
And be thou a faithful Dispenser of the Word of God
and of his holy Sacraments;
In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."*

These are the words from the Book of Common Prayer by which the priest gives God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation:

*"Our Lord Jesus Christ,
who hath left power to his Church
to absolve all sinners who truly repent
and believe in him,
of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences:
And by his authority committed to me,
I absolve thee from all thy sins,
In the Name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Ghost."*

What do we do?

First, we make time alone for self examination, asking the Holy Spirit to show us our failures and sins in relation to:

1. God.
2. Others.
3. Our own personal growth.

There are booklets and other guides to this process, often called "examination of conscience". Some people find it helpful to make a list of their sins and take it with them when they go to the priest.

We go to the church and spend a few moments in prayer as a final preparation.

Then we make our way to the appointed place where the priest is waiting, and we kneel in front of the crucifix. There is always a card there containing the words for us to say. When we come to the actual confession part, we bring to Jesus on the cross all our sins, naming them one by one. We look to the cross expectantly for forgiveness, and the priest, sitting beside us, brings us words of encouragement and a 'penance' or prayer of re-dedication (and perhaps something to *do*). Then he pronounces the "absolution" (Jesus' words of forgiveness).

After a final prayer we return to the main part of the church to say our penance.

Healing for our souls

When we go to the doctor, we do not talk about our condition in vague, general terms - we tell him plainly what we think is wrong and where we are hurting. Jesus is the 'physician of our souls'. He longs to pour his forgiveness into the wounds in our life and in our relationships caused by sin. We should

therefore tell him specifically all our failures, and seek his pardon for our mistakes. In this sacrament, we come to Jesus just as we are, penitent for the ways we fail him, and he makes us brand new. He restores the grace of baptism in us, pouring new life and forgiveness into our waiting hearts.

How often?

We use the Sacrament of Reconciliation whenever we need this inner healing and cleansing. The priest is usually available at a particular time every week for this ministry. Many Christians find it helpful to observe the rule of making their confession before the major festivals of the year and before the major events of their lives.

In addition, the Church expects us to use this sacrament if we have committed any "mortal" sins. These are sins of an objectively grave kind that we freely commit with full awareness of how evil they are.

Is God calling you to discover his healing grace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Make an appointment with your priest to talk it over.

If this is your first time, it will be helpful to consider your life in three periods:

1. childhood,
2. teenage and young adulthood,
3. older adulthood.

Most of all, don't forget to ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you should bring to the cross in your confession.

Jesus said that there is joy in heaven over sinners who repent. That is because repentance reconciles us to God, to each other, and to ourselves.

MEETING JESUS IN THE SACRAMENT OF ANOINTING THE SICK

The Gospels are full of stories that highlight Jesus' concern to bring healing to the sick. What's more, the emphasis is often on his love and compassion for those who were shunned and treated as outcasts by the rest of society.



The oil used in this sacrament is blessed by the bishop on Maundy Thursday each year. Oil has been associated with healing from the earliest times.

One of the themes that recurs throughout the Gospels is that Jesus shared the fulness of his ministry to the sick and distressed with his disciples. Look at this passage from S. Luke:

*"Jesus called the twelve together
and gave them power and authority
to drive out demons and to cure diseases.
Then he sent them out
to preach the kingdom of God
and to heal the sick . . .
And they departed
and went through the villages,
preaching the gospel
and healing people everywhere."*
- Luke 9:1-2,6

In Mark 6:13 we find Jesus sending his disciples out to lay their hands upon the sick and to anoint them with oil.

From the very beginning, then, ministry with the sick was an important dimension of the Church's life.

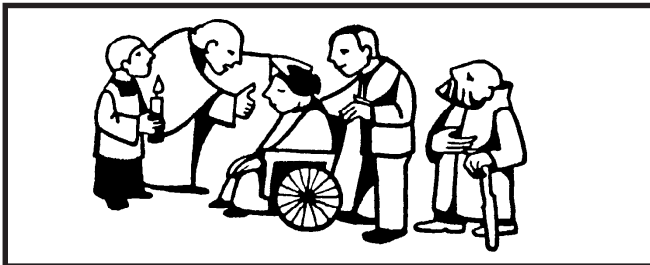
Writing to communities of Christians in the First Century, the Apostle James says:

*"Is any among you sick?
Let him call for the elders of the church,
and let them pray over him,
anointing him with oil
in the name of the Lord;
and the prayer of faith will save the sick man,
and the Lord will raise him up;
and if he has committed sins,
he will be forgiven."*

(James 5:14-15)

In the Sacrament of Anointing, these outward signs speak to us very clearly of God's healing touch upon our life. The laying on of hands by the priest expresses God's desire to strengthen and bless us. The tracing of the sign of the cross upon our forehead and open palms with holy oil, powerfully conveys God's desire to renew and refresh us by his Holy Spirit.

In the Church's healing ministry miracles sometimes happen. Sometimes there is a cessation of pain. Sometimes the natural healing processes of body and mind seem to accelerate. Sometimes the grace given is special strength to face what lies ahead. *Always* there is an encounter with the healing love of the risen Jesus to renew us within.



Why do we receive this sacrament?

We are often conscious of our need of healing on different levels. We need at times to be strengthened physically. But we also need to be renewed inwardly. We have inner wounds that need God's healing touch - hurts from the past, fears, and worries. In the sacrament of anointing Jesus can set us free from these things and fill us with a new sense of his peace and cleansing.

When it is put like that, it is easy to see why the Church uses this sacrament in her ministry with the dying. In that context, it is an encounter with Jesus the Good Shepherd, who anoints our head with oil and frees us from fear as he takes us through the valley of the shadow of death.

When should we ask for anointing?

We should seek this sacrament in time of sickness, in time of distress and anxiety, and if we know that we or someone else is about to die.

A good rule of thumb is to be anointed before any surgery requiring a general anaesthetic. At a time when we lose control, when we place ourselves in the doctor's hands, we should also place ourselves in God's hands in this special sacramental way.

The Sacrament of Anointing is available at any time: in church, at home or in hospital. We should not hesitate to ask for it. It is sometimes celebrated in the context of a special Mass for healing.

MEETING JESUS IN THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

We have seen that in the sacraments Jesus Christ touches our lives in beautiful ways and gives us special gifts of grace. All the sacraments have this common purpose: to fill us with God's life, so that we can share this life with others.

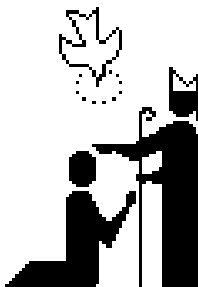
The Sacrament of Confirmation is really the completion of our Baptism. As the bishop lays his hand on us and anoints us with the holy oil of Chrism, the Holy Spirit is given to us so that we can become channels of his love wherever we live and work.

In Confirmation God both calls and equips us. He calls us to live out our faith in every situation and to spread the love of Christ in whatever we do. And he gives us the strength and spiritual energy that we need to do this, by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Each of us has a special part to play in building up God's kingdom.

These words that are often used at the beginning of a Confirmation Mass help us to understand the importance of this sacrament:

*"On the day of Pentecost
the apostles received the Holy Spirit
as the Lord had promised.
They also received the ministry
of giving the Holy Spirit to others,
thus completing the work of Baptism.
Bishops, as the successors of the apostles,
have this same ministry
of giving the Holy Spirit to the baptized."*

*"The coming of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation
fills us with the love of God,
strengthens us to carry out our different vocations,
and deepens the unity and holiness of the Church."*



*Confirmation is a spiritual sign and seal
to make us more like Christ,
and more perfect members of his Church.
At his baptism by John,
Jesus himself was anointed by the Spirit
and sent out on his public ministry
to set the world on fire.*

*"These brothers and sisters of ours
have already been baptized into Christ.
Today they will receive the power of his Spirit.
We offer this Eucharist for them,
that they may be witnesses in the world
to the dying and rising of Christ,
and that their way of life will at all times reflect
his goodness and love."*

*"We pray that they may be active members of the Church,
alive in Jesus Christ.
We pray that, guided by the Holy Spirit,
they may give their lives completely in the service of all,
as did Christ, who came not to be served but to serve."*

(Our next study will deal more fully with the Holy Spirit in our lives.)

MEETING JESUS IN THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

In the Sacrament of Christian Marriage God calls and equips us to serve him in partnership. He unites a man and a woman, and asks them to work for his kingdom together. The outward sign in this sacrament is the physical union of a man and a woman blessed by the Church.



This kind of marriage is a valuable tool in God's hand, for married Christians are called to give others a glimpse of God's uniting love in a world that is often divided and broken. In fact, the marriage of Christians is a God-given picture of the deeply spiritual and sacramental union that exists between Jesus the bridegroom and the Church his bride.

In the sacrament of marriage, Jesus takes two lives and so fills them with his love that their union overflows in tender care for others. A Christian marriage should always be character-

ised by this openness to others. It should always be open to the birth of children to be nurtured in the faith community.

The Sacrament of Marriage is a part of God's plan for men and women. His intention is that those called to be married should experience physical, intellectual and spiritual fulfilment in the union of their lives. The marriage service assumes that two partners have chosen Christian Marriage because they want God to occupy first place in their marriage. This is marriage at its highest level because it is open to God's guidance and direction throughout.

This reality of two separate personalities being knit together doesn't fully dawn on us before marriage. It is something that grows with the passing of the years, and it sometimes requires hard work, especially when the relationship is under pressure. However, nurtured by the sacraments and supported by the life of the parish community, couples are able to look back over the years and see the hand of God at work in all their circumstances.

Christian Marriage is a life-long partnership. It is not something to be "tried out"; it is a union in which two people promise to faithfully love and cherish each other until they are separated by death. To believe in Christian Marriage is to believe that God himself creates the union and that his grace is given to the couple to sustain and deepen their union through the sorrows as well as the joys of life.



MEETING JESUS IN THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDER

In the Sacrament of Holy Order God calls and equips men to serve him as bishops, priests or deacons in direct succession from Jesus and the apostles. The outward sign of the Sacrament of Holy Order is the laying on of the bishop's hands. Our study on the Church has already dealt with this sacrament in some detail.

Bishops

Suffice to say here that the bishop is, in the language of the old Prayer Book, our "Father in God". He exercises the leadership of the Apostle in the local Church (the "diocese"). This entails the responsibility to shepherd the church, to lead it in worship and service, and to teach the way of salvation



Priests

The bishop's local representative, the priest, is set apart to be the hands and voice of Jesus in a special way within the parish community. The priest is called to represent Jesus at the altar and in the other sacraments, thus filling the people of God with the life of God himself. He is to bring the loving care of Jesus the Good Shepherd to a parish. He is called to proclaim the Word of God to his people and to teach them the way of the Gospel, to give them a clear lead in their lives of Christian discipleship.

Deacons

The deacon is a sign of Jesus who made himself the "deacon" or servant of all (see Mark 10:45, Luke 22:27). He assists the bishop and priests in the work of pastoral care and in the Church's worship. He has a special role in the distribution of Holy Communion.

We should always be praying that those whom God has called to ordination will respond to his voice.



Living for Jesus ... Day by Day

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

After his resurrection, Jesus promised his followers that the Holy Spirit would come, enabling them to live lives of discipleship and witness. That promise came true for them on the day of Pentecost. The wary, resistant disciples were changed into confident, courageous apostles when the Holy Spirit filled them with his love and power.

In the lead-up to Confirmation we, too, awaited the promise of Jesus. We, too, prayed for the equipping grace of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, the Sacrament of Confirmation was our Pentecost. The Bishop stretched out his hands over us and prayed:

*"Let your Holy Spirit now rest upon your servants:
the Spirit of Wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of Counsel and inward strength,
the Spirit of Knowledge and true godliness."*

He put his right hand on our head praying:

*"Strengthen, Lord, your servant
with your Holy Spirit."*

Then he anointed us on the forehead with the holy oil of Chrism, saying:

"Be sealed with the Spirit, the Gift of the Father"

That was a great moment. It was the completion of our Baptism. The Holy Spirit was given to us. But be sure of this: it was a beginning, not an end! For the Bishop went on to pray:

*"Defend O Lord
your servants. . . .
that they may
daily increase
in your Holy Spirit
more and more. . . ."*

Confirmation is the beginning of a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. A life in which our friendship with him is deepened each day.

We should always remember that God's grace is a gift not only to be treasured, but to be given away. God wants us to overflow with his Spirit to others in care and witness, to be channels of his love for others. It is our privilege and responsibility to be co-workers with the risen Jesus, part-

*Breathe in me, Spirit of God,
that I may think what is holy.*

*Drive me, Spirit of God,
that I may do what is holy.*

*Draw me, Spirit of God,
that I may love what is holy.*



*Strengthen me, Spirit of God,
that I may preserve what is holy.*

*Guide me, Spirit of God,
that I may never lose what is holy.*

ners with him in all sorts of ways, so that others may be drawn into the circle of his love.

In the Bible there is some striking picture language used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit:

Wind (John 3:8; Acts 2:2)

We cannot see the wind. Sometimes we can feel it. But we can always see what it does. Likewise, the Holy Spirit works secretly, but the effects of his work can be seen.

Fire (Luke 3:16; Acts 2:3)

Just as fire burns up the rubbish and warms us when we are cold, so the Holy Spirit is at work amongst us to purge out the sin that comes between ourselves and God, and to keep God's love alive in our hearts.

Water (John 7:38-39)

In the land of the Bible, water was very hard to get, and it was highly valued. People travelling through the desert would look for wells and fountains to quench their thirst. The Holy Spirit quenches our "inner thirst" for spiritual reality.

The Dove (Matthew 3:16)

The dove is a symbol of peace in God's new world. It is also very gentle and easily sent away. The Holy Spirit helps us to be at peace with God and with one another; he will only work within us if we make him welcome.

Isaiah 11:1-2, Galatians 5:22,23 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 tell us more about the work of the Holy Spirit. Through prayer and the sacraments we ought to be growing daily in him.



EVERY AREA OF LIFE

S. Paul says: “Here is my advice - live your whole life in the Spirit, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of your lower nature.” (Galatians 5:16)

And in another place:

“If the Spirit of God finds a home in you, do not live or act in a carnal, worldly way, but live by the Spirit.” (Romans 8:9)

When we begin to take God seriously, we discover a new way of living. Our attitudes and behaviour begin to be shaped not by the cynical, unbelieving world, but by the Gospel of Jesus. Following Jesus closely has never been easy. It sometimes means persecution; it always means separating ourselves from actions and thoughts that are contrary to the Gospel.

There can be no division in our life, no compartmentalising. God is not only for Sundays but for every day of the week. In fact the real test of Sunday worship is how it affects us on Monday morning. Jesus wants to be Lord over all of our life, not just over parts of it.

That certainly means a lifestyle marked and characterised by the love and forgiveness of Christ. It means that we try to

let Jesus rule as king in our homes, in our working lives, in all our relationships. It means letting Jesus be Lord over our free time, possessions and money, too. In short, it is letting Jesus be Lord of all.

S. Paul wrote:

“Whatever you do, in word, or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.”
(Colossians 3:17).

God wants to take us and fill us with his life. We should surrender to him our best gifts, the talents he has given us, and ask him to consecrate them and use them for his glory. Each of us can use our skills for God’s kingdom. (Think about what you are good at, and ask your priest how you can use these gifts and abilities for the Lord.)

God meets us in the ordinary things of life. We should get into the habit of looking for him in everything we do, and welcoming him.

LIGHTING THE WAY FOR OTHERS

In Baptism, the new Christian is presented with a lighted candle. It symbolises the living faith and radiant love that Jesus places within us. We are told to keep the flame of faith alive in our hearts so as to bear witness to Jesus in the world.

In Confirmation the Holy Spirit empowers and equips us to be witnesses - to be lights aflame with the love of Jesus in a world of shadows.


Have the key people in our lives, at work, at home and at leisure, discovered Jesus Christ for themselves yet? It is to these very people that God is calling us to be witnesses.

Remember what a witness is. In a law court a witness is called to tell their story, to give an account of what happened to them. They are asked to relate the details of what took place. A witness for Jesus is someone who shares with others what Jesus has done for them.

How can we do this? Look at S. Paul’s story in Acts 26:1-23. It falls into three clear parts and gives us a pattern we can adopt ourselves. We should simply tell our own story, as S. Paul did.

Verses 4-11	his life without Christ.
Verses 12-18	his encounter with Christ.
Verses 19-23	the effect this had on his life.

We should use these three headings to think about our own story. We should work out how to share it in a natural and non-



***"Once you were darkness,
but now you are
light
in the Lord;
walk as children of light".***
(Ephesians 5:8)

threatening way. We might begin by talking about our sense of emptiness and despair. Then we would describe how we came to faith in Jesus, and how we became part of the Church community. We would finish by sharing the difference this has made for us, being realistic about the joys and difficulties of following Jesus today.

We should look for opportunities to share our story, or bits of it, with people we meet in our daily lives, especially those who are searching for truth. We should be gentle but confident, because the Holy Spirit gives us the courage we need.

CHANGING THE WORLD: PRAYER

It has been said that to pray as we should we need a newspaper in our hand. Jesus said that we are “in the world . . . but not of the world” (John 17: 14-16).

As Christians we ought to know what is going on in different parts of the world, for the Gospel speaks God’s word to every human concern.

A useful pattern for intercession is to remember people before God in ever-widening circles of prayer. We begin with

personal needs - those who face marital strains, bereavement and depression. Next we pray for family concerns, broken homes, children at risk. It helps to picture in our minds different scenes and the needs of different age groups. Then we should think and pray about our local community - social problems, unemployment, and poverty, remembering our civic

leaders and local institutions, especially schools.

Our prayers should also encompass national issues that are before parliament and the government. Policies on abortion, euthanasia, the environment, homelessness, education, economics and job-creation pose difficult questions and demand Christian reflection.

Our circle of prayer should widen to embrace all those ordinary people who live in the midst of violence, hunger and political turmoil in different parts of the world. As Catholic Christians we are an integral part of the world, and we are joined in the communion and solidarity of prayer with our brothers and sisters who witness to Christ in situations of great suffering.

We bring these needs to the foot of the



cross, because it is only in the light of the cross, where God himself shared fully in our human anguish and pain, that we can ponder the Christian response to these contemporary dilemmas.

So, we pray for the world and its people with a newspaper in our hand, and with Christ's compassion in our heart, before the crucifix.

This is what S. Paul wrote:

"My advice is that, first of all, there should be prayers offered on behalf of all people - petitions, intercessions and thanksgiving - and especially for kings and others in authority, so that we may be able to live godly and reverent lives in peace and quiet. To do this is right, and will please God our Saviour: he wants everyone to be saved and to reach full knowledge of the truth."

(1 Timothy 2:1)

CHANGING THE WORLD: ACTION

Imagine that there are ten people at a party. One of them takes over and eats more than half the food, leaving the other nine to share the rest. And then, when the time has come to clean up, it turns out that this same person has made most of the mess. None of us would regard that as being fair, just or moral.

And yet, the world is just like that. Less than one tenth of the world's population uses up more than half of the world's resources. This same one tenth produces nine tenths of the world's pollution.

Injustices and lopsided priorities can also be seen in the huge amounts of money spent on weapons at a time when whole nations live in poverty. These facts were published by the United Nations Organization:

- * The amount of money spent on one tank could provide equipment for 520 school classrooms.
- * The amount of money spent on one jet fighter could provide 40,000 village pharmacies.
- * The amount of money spent on one destroyer could provide electrification for 13 cities and 19 rural zones with a population of 9 million inhabitants.

Within our communities there is poverty, racism, organized injustice and oppression of minority groups.

Jesus expects his followers to work for a better world and the elimination of all that oppresses and dehumanises people. The Church is meant to stand out against "structural evil" in our society, and work for justice, peace and a more equitable distribution of the earth's resources. The Church is meant to be in the forefront of ethical debates on issues like abortion, euthanasia, multiculturalism, HIV/AIDS, nuclear energy, sexuality, unemployment and job creation. As members of the Church, and as individuals, we must heed the Gospel imperative to involve ourselves in the struggle for a new world order.

At the same time we are to care in a non-judgmental way for the needy, the imprisoned, the lonely, the poor, the disadvantaged, the sick, the marginalised... all who have been rendered powerless, all who have become victims (see Matthew 25).



*"Christ has no body now on earth, but yours,
no hands but yours, no feet but yours;
yours are the eyes through which is to look out
Christ's compassion to the world,
yours are the feet
with which he is to go about doing good,
and yours are the hands
with which he is to bless us now."*

- S. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

*"... come out from before your tabernacles.
You cannot claim to worship Jesus in the tabernacle
if you do not pity Jesus in the slum...
If you say that an Anglo-Catholic has a right
to hold his peace
while his fellow citizens are living in hovels
beneath the streets,
then I say to you,
that you do not know the Lord Jesus in his Sacrament."*

(Frank Weston, Bishop of Zanzibar in 1923)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Many people define a Christian as "someone who keeps the Ten Commandments".

There are two problems with this. First, it leads to the Commandments being applied only to *personal* morality, and they become a kind of "score sheet", as in the case of the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-27). Second, the impression is given that our relationship with God is transactional, controlled by laws. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our relationship with God is about unconditional love, grace, forgiveness, new birth through baptism, and living in fellowship with Jesus and those with whom we gather at the altar. "Christians are not perfect - just forgiven!" - as the slogan says.

But Jesus made it clear that he did not intend to do away with the commandments (see Matthew 5:17). Rather, he showed us that they are *primarily* about his people *living in community*.

He deepened their significance, by reminding us that they have to do with our *relationships*. In his teaching they are:

* **Invitations to love**

The commandments call forth love from us when we do not respond to God and others as we should.

* **Guides to love**

They give us a course of action when we are not sure what response is demanded by love.

The Traditional Version (Exodus 20)	Contemporary Statement (Catechism of the Episcopal Church, USA)	Communal Perspective (Fr. Christopher Gleeson SJ)
1 You shall have no other gods before me.	To love and obey God and to bring others to know him.	(1 & 2) A community that wants to serve the true God cannot make 'gods' of money and power.
2 You shall not worship idols.	To put nothing in the place of God.	
3 You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.	To show God respect in thought, word and deed.	You may not use the name of our liberating God to legitimate injustice or oppression.
4 You shall keep the Sabbath day holy.	To set aside regular times for worship, prayer, and the study of God's ways.	The sabbath is for resting in order to remember the purpose of our work: the building of a world of peace and joy.
5 Honour your father and mother.	To love, honour, and help our parents and family; to honour those in authority, and to meet their just demands.	Families in community must be respected and built up. Their rights must be defended.
6 You shall do no murder.	To show respect for the life God has given to us; to work and pray for peace; to bear no malice, prejudice or hatred in our hearts; and to be kind to all the creatures of God.	Everyone must have the right to life. We must build a society where life is valued.
7 You shall not commit adultery.	To use all our bodily desires as God intended.	Relationships between men and women must be marked by equality, mutual love, and faithfulness. Marriage is to be honoured.
8 You shall not steal.	To be honest and fair in our dealings; to seek justice, freedom, and the necessities of life for all people; and to use our talents and possessions as ones who must answer for them to God.	Everyone must have sufficient. Everyone needs comfort and security. No one may rob another.
9 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.	To speak the truth, and not to mislead others by our silence.	Without truth, trust and dialogue are impossible. Society is destroyed at its roots.
10 You shall not covet.	To resist temptations to envy, greed and jealousy; to rejoice in other people's gifts and graces; and to do our duty for the love of God, who has called us into fellowship with him.	Community and equality are only possible when we get rid of greed and the desire to possess and accumulate.

BEING PRACTICAL: A RULE OF LIFE

God has great plans for each of us. He wants to use us to his glory in beautiful ways.

But if we are to discover our vocation, our ministry among his people, we must listen for his voice in prayer. And we must commit ourselves to a regular daily pattern of living or "Rule of Life". We will need to revise this as the life of Jesus grows within us, at different points along our faith journey. Our Rule of Life should include a definite commitment to:

a) Mass each Sunday and on other major holy days.

b) Daily prayer and Scripture reading.

We must decide . . . when is the best time?
where is the best place?

We should think about being committed to at least one weekday Mass, and perhaps joining a parish study or prayer group.

d) Regular and sacrificial giving to the Church through our parish.

c) Regular times of renewal.

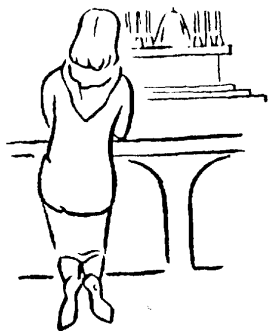
Perhaps an annual retreat, occasional quiet day or weekend pilgrimage?

Use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Finding a spiritual director or confessor to guide us on our spiritual journey?

e) Participating in the caring work of our parish.

Each of us should put together a rule of life using these five headings. If we have difficulties doing so, our parish priest will be able to help.



What we do in Church

"But it's so high church!" Every now and then a visitor is heard to say that about our worship. In fact, it's not a very helpful thing to say because the term **"high church"** means different things to different people. It can mean anything from turning east for the Creed, to saying the Rosary before the service begins!

In this parish we think of ourselves as simply "mainstream Christian", because our reverent and homely way of worship is fairly normal on the Anglican spectrum, and, what's more, it reflects the approach to worship that has been practised by the vast majority of Christians down through the centuries.

This study will help you to understand what we do and why we do it.

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

Every family and every community celebrates anniversaries, birthdays, and other special occasions. The Church also has important days that come around each year.

And just as we have the seasons of winter, spring, summer and autumn, so the Church year is divided into different seasons. This forms a balanced cycle of devotion. Being at Mass every Sunday and on every major holy day (still the Church's rule except in the case of sickness or major works of mercy) enables us to enter fully into the saving mystery of Christ.

ADVENT



The Church year starts with the season of Advent at the beginning of December.

"Advent" is an old word that means "coming". During the season of Advent we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus at Christmas. We also prepare ourselves for his coming again in glory at the end of time. In this season it is traditional for sermons to include reflection on "the four last things": death, judgment, heaven and hell.

The colour for Advent is purple.

CHRISTMAS



'Christmas' means 'Christ's Mass'. On Christmas Day, 25th December, we keep the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank God the Father for sending his Son into the world.

The colour for Christmas is white or gold.

EPIPHANY



This is from a Greek word which means "showing" or "revelation". At Epiphany, (the 6th January - or the Sunday nearest that date) we celebrate the glory of Jesus as God and man being shown to the whole world.

We remember the coming of the Kings from the east to worship Jesus and to offer

him gifts. They symbolically represent all the peoples of the earth coming to Jesus for salvation.

The colour for Epiphany is white or gold.

LENT

Lent is when we commemorate the forty days and forty nights that Jesus fasted and prayed in the desert.



It is the time when we prepare for Holy Week by deepening our union with Jesus, by giving up things that we really like ("fasting"), by doing special things in his honour, by confessing our sins, and by revising our "Rule of Life" if need be.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and goes for forty days.

The colour for Lent is purple.

HOLY WEEK

We go to Church a lot during Holy Week so as to be with Jesus in his sufferings and death.



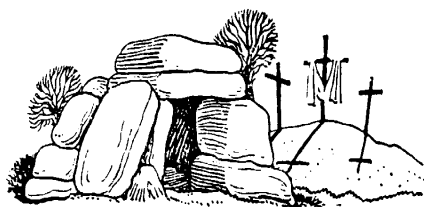
On **Palm Sunday** we commemorate the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. The colour is red.

On **Maundy Thursday** the priest washes the feet of twelve men in imitation

of Jesus in the upper room and the Mass of the Lord's Supper is celebrated, taking us into the mysteries Jesus shared with his Apostles on the night before he died. The colour is white or gold.

Good Friday takes us to the hill of Calvary where Jesus died for us. In the Liturgy we hear the story of the Passion, we kiss the feet of Jesus as the priest brings the crucifix to us, and we receive Holy Communion. The colour is red.

EASTER



During the Easter season we celebrate with great rejoicing the rising of Jesus from the dead, and the new life he gives to us.

The Easter Vigil Mass on Holy Saturday night is the start of the Easter Season. This Mass contains many ancient ceremonies which make it easier for us to enter into what the Resurrection of Christ really means for us and for the world.

The colour for the Easter Season is white or gold.

During the fifty days of the Easter season two important festivals occur:

Ascension Day is when we celebrate the return of Jesus to heaven to reign as King, and to intercede for us as our great High Priest.



We also thank him for his presence with us today.

Ascension Day is forty days after Easter begins, and is always a Thursday.

Pentecost Sunday, ten days after Ascension Day, the fiftieth day of the Easter Season, is when we give thanks for the Holy Spirit who came to the Apostles filling them with strength and power. This same Holy Spirit has dwelt in the Catholic Church ever since, leading and guiding her into all the truth, as Jesus himself promised.



The colour for Pentecost is red.

TRINITY SUNDAY

On this day we thank God for revealing himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



Trinity Sunday is the Sunday after Pentecost.

The colour for Trinity Sunday is white or gold.

CORPUS CHRISTI

"Corpus Christi" is Latin for "The Body of Christ", and on this day we give thanks that Jesus is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.



Corpus Christi is either the Thursday or the Sunday after Trinity Sunday.

The colour for Corpus Christi is white or gold.

*My Lord
and
My God*

ORDINARY TIME

During "Ordinary Time" the colour is green, the colour of growth. On each of these Sundays we concentrate on growing more and more in our love for God and one another. Each Sunday in Ordinary Time has its own theme, and its own lesson. These Sundays occur between Epiphany and Lent, and after Corpus Christi.

The last (34th) Sunday in Ordinary Time is **The Feast of Christ the King** when we look back over the road we have travelled since Advent began and give thanks for the Kingship of Christ over the whole year, over our lives, and over all things in heaven and earth.

WHAT DO THE COLOURS MEAN ?

The vestments used at Mass, as well as the altar and lectern hangings, have different colours for different days and seasons of the Church's year.

WHITE

White (or gold) is used for the great festivals of our Lord Jesus Christ, his Mother, the Saints who are not martyrs, and occasions such as baptisms and marriages. It is a colour of glory, purity and joy.

GREEN

Green is used for Ordinary Time. It is the colour of nature and growth. It reminds us that we should be growing in our love for God and one another as we worship together.

RED

Red is used for the Holy Spirit who at Pentecost came upon the apostles as tongues of fire. Red is also used for Martyrs (those who have been killed for following Jesus). We use it for Palm Sunday & Good Friday when we think of Jesus shedding his Blood for us. Red is the colour of blood and fire. It is also a royal colour of victory.

PURPLE

Purple is the colour for repentance and sorrow for sin. It is used during Lent and Advent.

BLACK

Black vestments, often richly embroidered with cloth of gold, are sometimes used at a Funeral Mass. They remind us that we must face up to our grief and sorrow. At the same time, the embroidery on the black helps us to see the glory of our Lord's resurrection shining through the darkest tragedy.

ROSE

This soft pink is sometimes used on the Third Sunday of Advent and the Fourth Sunday of Lent in anticipation of the joy of Christmas and Easter.



The Blessed Virgin Mary always said 'yes' to God and did his will. "I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word" was how she responded to God.

FESTIVALS OF OUR LADY

She became the Mother of Jesus. She is still his Mother; she is still especially close to him. And she is the mother of all his people, *our* Mother.

Next to Jesus, Mary has the highest place of honour in the Church, because it was through her 'yes' to God that Jesus was able to come into the world to save

us.

Mary has a great number of names and titles. Many people simply call her "Our Lady." The Lady Chapels in larger churches and cathedrals are there to give Mary a special place of honour in our prayers and devotion. So are the shrines, the statues and pictures of her that we see

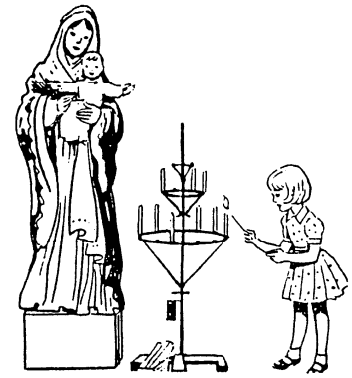
in churches where people pray and light candles. Doing this helps us to be close to God through the prayers of Mary.

A popular title for Mary is “Queen of Heaven”. This means that, next to Jesus, she is honoured above all the angels and saints. Anglicans often use her English title “Our Lady of Walsingham”, after the Norfolk village which has been a centre of pilgrimage for nearly 1000 years.

Throughout the year, there are special days on which we honour Mary. In

particular we celebrate:

- * **‘The Immaculate Conception’**
8th December - when God filled her with his grace.
- * **‘The Annunciation’**
25th March - when the Angel brought God’s word to her and she said ‘YES’.
- * **‘The Assumption’**
15th August - when she was reunited with Jesus in the glory of heaven.



OTHER SAINTS’ DAYS

On many weekdays of the year, we have special celebrations for those of our brothers and sisters in Christ who served God well and are now in heaven. We call them “the Saints”. They are the heroes of the Faith.

Saints from every age and from different countries and cultures are remembered in this way. Many of them have been given a special day in the Church’s calendar. We call it their “feast day”.

It is important for us to realize that the Saints pray for us as we journey through this life.

They are still alive - alive in Christ. They love us. They are part of the special family into which we were baptized. They are still our brothers and sisters in Christ. They worship with us. They want us to rely on God’s grace as they did. Their prayers really do help!

WHEN WE COME TO MASS



The order of service for the Mass is printed on a card so that even newcomers can follow what is happening. On Sundays the special prayers and readings set for the day are printed in the weekly pew

sheet. When you have been coming regularly, you will discover that you can follow everything quite well without even needing the card. It is then that you are able to really enter into the “spirit” and “movement” of the Mass.

Because worship is telling God how much we love him, and offering him all we have and are in union with the perfect offering of Jesus, it is all embracing. God created us body, mind and spirit. Our love for other people has to do with the mind and the spirit, but it is usually expressed in a physical way. So, too, the Church realises that our love for God needs physical, active expression. This

we do in worship. We use our whole being in worship - our spirits, our minds, our senses, our voices and our bodies. All of what it means to be truly human is offered to God.

And so, we use outward symbols, ornaments and ceremonial to express in a physical and active way our love of God. The candles, the vestments, the incense, the bells, the singing, the standing, the kneeling, the sign of the cross, are all ancient outward expressions of our love for God. They are used to arouse and activate the spirit of love and worship within us, and to give glory to God.

CEREMONIAL

The style of worship varies from place to place according to different circumstances. It can be simple; it can be traditional; it can be sumptuous, accompanied by splendid music; it can be very contemporary. What matters is that we offer our very best to God, and celebrate both his greatness and his nearness.

ALTAR SERVERS

Altar servers of all ages are used to beautify the celebration of Mass, and to increase the sense of worship being a communal offering of praise to God.

CANDLES

Candles on the altar are a sign that Jesus who comes to us in the Blessed Sacrament is the Light of the World.

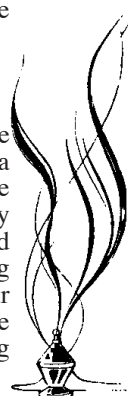
SIGN OF THE CROSS

The cross is, of course, the symbol of our faith. It is our badge. It was made on our foreheads when we were baptized to show that we had become members of Christ. It is natural that we should make it

for ourselves. It is customary to make the sign of the cross at different points during the Mass, at the beginning and end of private prayer and with holy water when entering and leaving the church.

INCENSE

The incense you see at the main Mass of the week is a sign used all through the Bible and in the Church’s history for the worship of God, and for his people’s prayers rising into his presence. To honour people and things with incense is the Church’s way of saying that they are sacred or holy.



WHEN TO BOW

We bow to an altar when passing in front of it, to show our respect for the place where the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. We also bow the head slightly when the name of Jesus, Mary, or the patron saint of the church is mentioned.

WHEN TO GENUFLECT

Whereas we *bow* to an “empty” altar, we *genuflect* (bend the knee) towards the altar if the Blessed Sacrament is on it, or kept in a Tabernacle behind it, usually with a white light burning nearby. It is customary to acknowledge the presence of Jesus in this way before going to our seat, and before leaving the church.

FURNITURE

THE TABERNACLE

THE FONT



The font is where babies and adults are baptized. It is in the sacrament of Baptism that we are born again and become part of the pilgrim people of God.

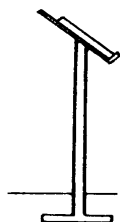
THE ALTAR



The altar is the special table used for the holy sacrifice of the Mass. (Larger churches have altars in side chapels for weekday Masses.)

The "tabernacle" is the special safe on the altar in which the Blessed Sacrament is kept ("reserved") for the sick and the dying, and also to be a focus of prayer and devotion. We know that the sacramental Presence of Jesus is in the tabernacle when the veil is drawn and a white light is burning nearby.

THE LECTERN



The lectern is the focal point for the proclamation of God's Word.

CRUCIFIXES



Crucifixes are a constant reminder of God's love, and what it cost him to redeem us.

THE PASCHAL CANDLE

This is a sign of Jesus risen from the dead, his light shining through the darkness of sin and death. During Eastertide it is near the font, to remind us that in Baptism we were joined to the dying and rising of Jesus, and received his light for our lives. (At baptism we are given a candle lit from the Paschal Candle)

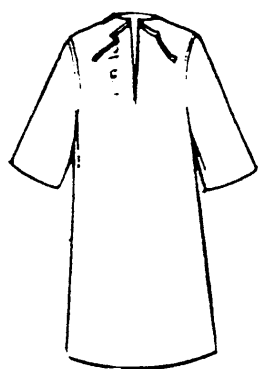


PICTURES AND STATUES

The pictures and statues of Jesus, Mary and the Saints are reminders of the "whole company of heaven" to which we belong and with whom we worship.

VESTMENTS

The priest wears special vestments at Mass to show that he is speaking and acting, not as an individual, but as a priest of the whole Catholic Church. The vestments are:



THE ALB

This is pure white and reminds us that we can approach God only because we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

THE STOLE

This is a sign of authority worn around the neck. It reminds us that the priest has received the authority of Jesus himself to proclaim the Word and to give the Sacraments. It is sometimes regarded as symbolising the "yoke" of Jesus.



THE CHASUBLE

This represents the seamless robe worn by Jesus at his passion. Some say that by covering the priest, it emphasises the unimportance of the particular celebrant: he is only acting on behalf of Jesus our great High Priest, the true celebrant of every Mass.



THE GIRDLE

This is worn around the priest's middle. It is now optional. The girdle reminds us that we must be "girded up" at all times (i.e. "ready") to serve God.



THE PEOPLE WE SEE IN CHURCH

One thing we all bring to Church on Sunday is our own humanity. We worship God, but we come as a *family* to offer our real lives to him.

Those restless children in the pew in front of us sometimes find the service a bit long, as we did at their age. They often resent the silence their parents try to enforce on them. And at times even the best of them will squirm. They might tease their brothers and sisters. Every now and then one of them might ask aloud, "How much longer?" Do you think the children who went with their parents to hear Jesus were any different?

You will find the old man with the loud cough, the large lady who sits at the end of the pew and won't move over. You will see the tired man who keeps nodding off to sleep despite the proddings of his alert wife. You will see girls dressed more scantily than you think proper, and the boys will not abandon the Levis glued permanently to their skins.

You see, you belong to a very HUMAN family.

Since the family must renew itself with new loves and marriages, you will occasionally see lovebirds cuddling, paying far more attention to each other than to the loving Father whom they came to worship.

Those who are unattached may be checking out the field for possibilities. Might not some ro-

mances have started among the young who came to hear Jesus but got distracted by someone who was sitting nearby?

You may hear a choir which falls short of the choir of Westminster Abbey, or a folk group which never includes in its repertoire those hymns we remember from Sunday School or Evensong in the old days.

The reader may mumble, the sidesmen strut, the servers sometimes giggle behind the priest's back. How far from perfection is Sunday Mass, for all our trying! (And try we must, for God's glory). Although we do our best, it seems to be sprinkled with human failings. It seems so because it is.

Then there is the priest. He may be your favourite. He may be your far-from-favourite. He may seem hurried and distracted. He may be overly devout. He may preach a good sermon which starts, proceeds and finishes, or he may not have had time to write an ending, and try two or three different ones before he finishes. He may be too academic or not scholarly enough. He probably will not impress you as totally right. He's got all those human failings that Jesus had to put up with in his disciples!

Sunday Mass is a time for humans to gather for worship. Don't be too surprised if they bring their humanity with them. It would be stranger if they didn't.

A NOTE FROM FATHER DAVID

In the course of parish ministry, every priest accumulates, writes, re-writes, merges, plagiarises and edits material on the basics of the Faith for use with thoughtful young people and adults setting out on their faith journey.

The studies in this booklet have evolved over the years in precisely that manner. They are the result of much trial and error, and incorporate suggestions and insights gained from the groups that have used them.

Some of the material is original; much of it is based on and drawn from the range of books listed below.

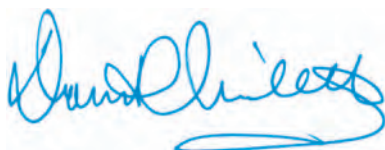
I am grateful to The Additional Curates Society of Birmingham, England, for permission to re-write and use passages from their adult catechumenate program *Follow Me* by Fathers Stephen Cottrell, Andrew Mayes, Ivor Moody and Martin Warner. # In addition, much of page 31 is a reworking of *We Live* by J. Redford (listed below).

A "Vatican II" approach has been taken, as is usual amongst contemporary Anglican Catholics. In other words, the studies are characterised by:

- * a reverence for Scripture;
- * a renewed understanding of the Church as sacramental mystery;
- * a dynamic view of the sacraments as encounters with the risen Jesus;
- * an awareness of the Holy Spirit in the life of prayer;
- * a commitment to justice and peace in the world.

The layout chosen makes it possible for the studies to be used in book form or photocopied as A3 size broadsheets. Some groups have found this to be helpful.

There is enough detail for three or four sessions to be spent on each topic as may be appropriate to the particular group and as time permits.



Father David Chislett SSC

These passages occur on pages 9-11, 15, 17, 20, 34, 36, 37-39.

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Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, SCM, London, 1974 ed.

D. Rosage, *Discovering Pathways to Prayer*, Living Flame Press, New York, 1975.

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Signs of Faith, Hope and Love (Essays by various authors), St. Mary's Bourne Street, London, 1986.