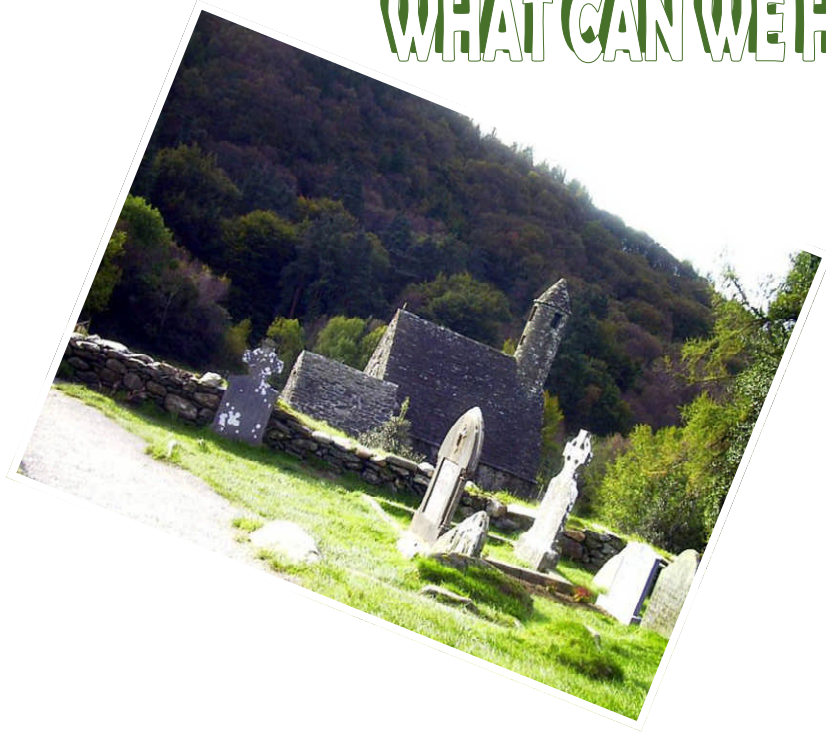


BEYOND DEATH: WHAT CAN WE HOPE FOR?



UNPACKING THE EMMAUS SERIES

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Designed and produced by Patrick Lim*

THE EMMAUS SERIES



Questions Catholics ask on their journey of Faith

BEYOND DEATH: WHAT CAN WE HOPE FOR?

SESSION 1

Introductory reading

Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador

These words - an expression of Christian hope - were written at a time when Romero knew that his struggle against injustice would almost certainly lead to his death. In 1980, he was murdered while preparing to celebrate Mass.

A Future not Our Own

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

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

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

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

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

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

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide 'yeast' that produces effects

far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything,

And there is a sense of liberation in realising that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,

an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

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

We are workers, not master-builders, ministers, not Messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own. ♦

Questions opening up the topic

Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15 – sharing reactions to the following questions:

Questions

- ◆ St Paul writes that 'there are three things that last, faith, hope and love' (1 Cor 13). What place does Christian **hope** have in your faith journey?
- ◆ Christians pray for 'a happy death'. Can you recall occasions in the lives of those you have known, in which this prayer was answered?

Viewing of DVD

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Chapter 1:
Coming to Terms with Death
- ◆ Chapter 2:
Old Testament Hopes

Sharing of reactions to the presentation

Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15 – sharing immediate reactions to the presentation:

Question

- ◆ What has struck you as enlightening, inspiring, or even puzzling?

A reading related to the theme

*Gospel of Matthew (25:31-46)
It describes the final Judgment.*

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All the nations will be assembled before him and he will separate men one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, 'Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me'. Then the virtuous will say to him in reply, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?' And the King will answer, 'I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me'. Next he will say to those on his left hand, 'Go away from

me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you never gave me food; I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink; I was a stranger and you never gave me welcome, naked and you never clothed me, sick or in prison and you never visited me'. Then it will be their turn to ask, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or naked, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?' Then he will answer, 'I tell you solemnly, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me'. And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the virtuous to eternal life. ♦

A final reflective sharing

This final sharing of personal responses to the questions given below is the most important phase of the session, and should be entered into generously, in the spirit of the Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15.

It may begin with a brief period of silent reflection, which is followed by two stages:

- 1. An informal Buzz Session in which each participant is able to express their response to each question – questions should be discussed separately.*
- 2. The sharing is brought to a conclusion, with each participant expressing, in a few words, what is their personal response to each question – in view of all that has been discussed in the session.*

Questions

- ♦ Are you surprised to learn of the hopes of God's people in Old Testament times? How can their hopes help shape our outlook as Christian believers?
- ♦ What is your reaction to what has been said about how we should come to terms with aging and the death that is inevitable for each of us?

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SESSION 2

Introductory reading

Letter to the Hebrews (13:12-14; 2:14-15; 12:1-2)

A letter written to strengthen the faith and hope of Jewish converts tempted to go back to their old ways.

Jesus suffered outside the gate to sanctify the people with his own blood. Let us go to him, then, outside the camp, and share his degradation. For there is no eternal city for us in this life, but we look for the one to come ...

As it was God's purpose to bring a great many of his children into glory, it was appropriate that God, for whom everything exists and through whom everything exists, should make perfect through suffering the leader who would take them to their salvation. For the one who sanctifies, and the ones who are sanctified are of the same stock; that is why he openly calls them brothers and sisters ...

We should throw off everything that hinders us, especially the sin that clings so easily, and keep running the race we have started. Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the sake of the joy which was still in the future, he endured the cross, disregarding the shameful of it, and from now on he has taken his place at the right hand of God's throne. ♦

Questions opening up the topic

Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15 – sharing reactions to the following questions:

Questions

- ♦ In your faith formation, has the relationship between this life and the life to come been explained to your satisfaction?
- ♦ If you were asked what basis there is in the New Testament scriptures for our Christian hope of everlasting life, how would you reply?

Viewing of DVD

- ♦ Chapter 3:
The New Testament: Hope Fulfilled
- ♦ Chapter 4:
Other Themes: Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, Judgment

Sharing of reactions to the presentation

Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15 – sharing immediate reactions to the presentation:

Question

- ♦ What has struck you as enlightening, inspiring, or even puzzling?

Reading related to the theme

The Hound of Heaven

The poem of Francis Thompson (1859-1907) who spent most of his life as a 'down and out'.

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat – and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet –
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me' ...



For, though I knew His love Who followed,
Yet was I sore adread
Lest having Him, I must have naught beside;



I said to dawn, Be sudden; to eve, Be soon;
With thy young skyey blossoms heap me over
From this tremendous Lover!
Float thy vague veil about me, lest He see!
I tempted all his servitors, but to find
My own betrayal in their constancy,
In faith to Him their fickleness to me,
Their traitorous trueness, and their loyal deceit.



Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet,
And a voice above their beat –
'Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me'.

I sought no more that after which I strayed
In face of man or maid; ...

I triumphed and I saddened with all weather,
Heaven and I wept together,
And its sweet tears were salt with mortal mine;
Against the red throb of its sun-set heart
I laid my own to beat,
And share commingling heat;
But not by that, by that, was eased my human smart.
In vain my tears were wet on Heaven's gray cheek.



Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!
My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,
And smitten me to my knee;
I am defenceless utterly ...
In the rash lustihood of my young powers,
I shook the pillaring hours
And pulled my life upon me; grimed with smears,
I stand amid the dust o' the mounded years –
My mangled youth lies dead beneath the heap.



Now of that long pursuit
Comes on at hand the bruit;
That voice is round me like a bursting sea:
'And is thy earth so marred,
Shattered in shard on shard?
Lo, all things fly thee, for thou flyest Me!
Strange, piteous, futile thing,
Wherefore should any set thee love apart?
Seeing none but I makes much of nothing', He said,
'And human love needs human meriting,
How hast thou merited –
Of all man's clotted clay the dingiest clot?
Alack, thou knowest not
How little worthy of any love thou art!

Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,
Save Me, save only Me?
All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms.
But just that thou might'st seek it in my arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home;
Rise, clasp My hand, and come!' ◇

Final reflective sharing

This final sharing of personal responses to the questions given below is the most important phase of the session, and should be entered into generously, in the spirit of the Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15.

It may begin with a brief period of silent reflection, which is followed by two stages:

- 1. An informal Buzz Session in which each participant is able to express their response to each question – questions should be discussed separately.*
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Questions

- ◆ What is the most significant thing you take from our discussion of what we can hope for after death?
- ◆ What new insights have you gained about life after death?

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION

Faith helps us to understand ageing and dying as part of our destiny, as God's creatures. Unfortunately, the message of Christian **hope** – 'a total hope even for the material world' - has been neglected in recent centuries. We will be helped to recover this total vision, if we become more familiar with the hopes of the Old Testament. Old Israel's hope in God's promises was boundless – looking forward to a new Exodus and a new Paradise, through sharing in God's friendship. In the Old Testament period God's people had no clear expectation of an afterlife; their vivid hopes looked to some kind of resurrection, and the transformation of the present world in 'a new heaven and a new earth'.

In Jesus Christ, our 'hope of glory', these expectations have been fulfilled in a manner beyond all the imaginings of the Old Testament. What we can hope for in eternal life is shown to us in the Risen Lord: he is the 'first fruits' of a humanity given to share in the very life and joy of the Creator – in a creation that is 'freed from its bondage to decay' through 'the power of his resurrection'. He is the New Adam through whom Paradise is regained. 'Knowing Christ' with a lively faith, we are given to know – 'in a glass darkly' - what we can hope for.

We have another intimation of what we can hope for in a fulfilled human destiny, in the universal yearnings established by the Creator in the human heart (Augustine, Aquinas, Manning Clark, William James). This theme is taken up by Vatican II (*Past. Const. On Church in Modern World, n.39*). - we may look forward to the fulfilment of personal yearnings (especially, 'love and its fruits'), the fulfilment of our social existence, and fulfilment of our sense of kinship with material creation.

A healthy Christian faith should have a balanced understanding of the traditional themes: **Heaven** (not a place, but a state in which our total fulfilment will be rooted in union with God - the source of all life and goodness); **Hell** (not a place, but a state of absolute rejection of God, possible to our human freedom, a destination towards which some are journeying, but from which we may dare to hope all will be saved by God's grace and mercy); **Purgatory** (a mysterious transition, in which the remains of selfishness are removed to make us worthy to share all things with God – comparable to the purification of the great saints in this life); and **Judgment** (self-knowledge in the presence of God's truth – as individuals, and in the total plan of God's creation, as the persons the present life has made us. ♦

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