

DO WE NEED

THE CHURCH?



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

DO WE NEED THE CHURCH?

SESSION 1

NOTE: *In order to present the material of this DVD in two parts, Chapter 2, 'Vatican II's Vision: the Mystery of the Church' is divided between the two sessions. Viewing ends 22 minutes into the DVD, at the heading, 'The Hopes of Old Israel Pointed to the Mystery of the Church'. Session 2 starts from that point.*

Introductory reading

An appeal by a French priest, Francois Marc sm

I would like to plead for a marian church; not for a church which multiplies processions and blesses huge statues, but a church which puts the gospel into practice, as Mary did.

The marian church follows Mary into the mountains, going off with her to encounter life; she visits men and women, and though things may seem to be sterile, she is on the watch for what is coming to birth, for possibilities, for the life that beats in things.

The marian church rejoices and sings. Instead of bemoaning its fate and the world's woes, she is in wonder at the beauty there is on the earth and in the human heart, as she sees what God is doing there.

The marian church knows that she is the object of a gratuitous love, and that God has the heart of a mother. She has seen God on the door step, on the outlook for the improbable return of a son; she has seen him throw his arms around his neck, place the festal ring on his finger, and himself organise the homecoming feast. When she pages through the family album, she sees Zacchaeus in his sycamore, the woman taken in adultery, the Samaritan woman, foreigners, the lepers, beggars and a common prisoner at his place of execution. So you see, the marian church despairs of no one, and 'does not quench the smoking flax'. When she finds someone on the side of the road wounded by life, she is moved by compassion, and with infinite tenderness tends their wounds. She is the safe harbour, who is always open, the refuge of sinners, 'mater misericordiae', mother of mercy.

The marian church lives in Nazareth in silence and simplicity. She does not live in a castle. Her home is like all the other homes. She goes out to chat with the other villagers. She weeps with them, she rejoices with them, but she never 'preaches' to them. Above all she listens ...

There at the foot of the Cross a people was born, a marian people. 'Seeing his mother, and near her the disciple whom he loved, Jesus said to his mother "Woman, this is your son". Then to the disciple he said "This is your mother". From that moment, the disciple made a place for her in his home'.

Brothers and sisters, let us belong to this people ... And, in the words of Therese of Lisieux, the Church will be in this world 'a heart resplendent with love'. ◇

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

- ◆ It is not surprising that today many committed Catholics are critical of aspects of the contemporary Church. What challenges do we face if the Church is to be renewed?
- ◆ What are the signs of hope you see in today's Church?

Viewing of DVD

NOTE: *Viewing of Session 1 starts from beginning of presentation and ends 22 minutes into the DVD, at the heading, 'The Hopes of Old Israel Pointed to the Mystery of the Church'.*

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Chapter 1:
We Believe in the Church
- ◆ Chapter 2:
Vatican II's Vision: the Mystery of the Church
(ends 22 minutes into the DVD)

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

Sign and Promise:

A Theology of the Church for a Changing World

(1988, pp. 195-197) by John Thornhill

The 'People of God' theme is deeply embedded in the biblical tradition. It came to prominence, almost over night, during the early days of Vatican II, reflecting the awakening of a new awareness in the Church, as it saw itself - not as a triumphalistic fortress in the midst of the world - but as a pilgrim people immersed in the drama of struggling humanity.

The title 'People of God' reminds the Church of its basic human reality. Essentially a plural of 'person', the term, 'people', implies a recognition of the importance of each individual believer within the community of disciples ... The life of the people of God is a fabric of personal stories. It is as a people that we are the Church; and the

story of old Israel and the story of the Church is made up of our stories, taken up as they are into the story of the New Adam.

It is a concept that speaks of roots in the past, calling God's people to remember the past it shares with old Israel; so that the Scriptures become a mirror in which the Church can better understand itself. It also implies a straining towards the future, an awareness of shared destiny, the journey we must make in search of the Kingdom.

Conceiving the Church as God's 'people' confronts us with its vital realism. It reminds us that in our life together there are varieties of gifts and functions, each bringing its own responsibility. As a people, our life unfolds within many smaller communities, in many local churches, each of which is called to contribute in its own way to the life of the whole communion. ◇

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

- ◆ Does this session give you a better understanding of the renewal that has been taking place since Vatican II?
- ◆ What new insights have you gained from this session?

DO WE NEED THE CHURCH?

SESSION 2

Introductory reading

Gospel of John (Chapter 15)

I am the true vine,
and my Father is the vinedresser.
Every branch in me that bears no fruit
he cuts away
and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes
to make it bear even more.
You are clean already,
by means of the word I have spoken to you.
Remain in me, as I am in you.
As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself,
unless it remains part of the vine,
neither can you unless you remain in me.
I am the vine,
you are the branches.
Whoever remains in me, with me in him,
bears fruit in plenty,
for cut off from me you can do nothing.

...

You are my friends,
if you do what I command you.
I shall no longer call you servants,
because a servant does not know
his master's business;
I call you friends,
because I have made known to you
everything I have learnt from my Father.
You did not choose me,
no, I chose you;
and I commissioned you
to go out and bear fruit,
fruit that will last;
so that the Father will give you
anything you ask in my name.
My command to you
is to love one another. ◇

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

- ◆ Do you think that our understanding of the place of the Church in God's designs has suffered from Catholics' lack of familiarity with the themes of the Scriptures?
- ◆ As you become more familiar with the Scriptures, what are some of the themes that have helped you to better understand God's Church?

Viewing of DVD

NOTE: Viewing of Session 2 starts 22 minutes into the DVD, at the heading 'The Hopes of Old Israel pointed to the Mystery of the Church', and continues to the end of the presentation.

- ◆ Chapter 2:
Vatican II's vision: The Mystery of the Church
(starts 22 minutes into the DVD)
- ◆ Chapter 3:
Vatican II's vision: The Mission of the Church

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

An alternative reading is provided in pages 24-25

*The Church of New Zealander
a poem by Paul Grano*

She who was mine
in the year's making
has bound me
beyond my breaking;

She is a lover
I resent and cherish.
I cannot escape her
though I perish;

Though I reject her
I am hers for ever
customed by bond
death cannot sever.

At the year's failing
whichever finds me –
Heaven or Hell-
yet she will bind me.

Would I escape
had I the choosing?
Would I rejoice
in the bond's losing?

No! by my heart's
most secret breath,
let me be prisoner-
in Life, in Death. ◇

An alternative second reading

Sign and Promise (pp113-14) by John Thornhill SM

When the ways of the living God found expression in our midst, it was through one who, identifying utterly with the ways of his Father, 'came not to be served but to serve' (Mt 20:28), the one who when he 'knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And during the supper ... laid aside his garment, girded himself with a towel ... and began to wash the disciples feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded' (Jn 13:1-5; cf. Lk 13:37) - the one who 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant' (Phil 2:7).

This emphasis, at the very heart of the mission undertaken by the Saviour, is more than a simple lesson in humility, it is a revelation of the astounding ways of the living God, ways which affirm the ultimate truth of all personhood and the relations with others that are essential to all personhood. This divine truth does not deny personal differentiation – he who washes the disciples' feet unhesitatingly declares himself their 'Lord and teacher' (Jn 13:14). But it affirms that this differentiation must never serve as a basis for domination or manipulation of any kind: according to the ways of God revealed in Christ, the form that all relationships should have is that of friends.

This truth, lived out by the God who made himself a servant in our midst, is not easy to hear, and more difficult to accept. With Peter, we find it hard to accept the God who, by coming to us as a friend who will kneel and wash out feet, overturns all our human expectations and challenges the very depths of our personhood. But is the gospel of John not telling us that this truth lived out by Jesus is at the heart of the Good News the Church must give to the world? We are brought face to face

with significance of the new commandment to which the Saviour calls his disciples: 'love one another as I have loved you' (Jn 13:34). The Church's life of service in the midst of the human community must be shaped by this truth, that the world may believe and find life. Not only should it be the touchstone of all consideration of Christian ministry; it should define the very nature of the Church's mission. ◇

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.

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Questions

- ◆ In what we have seen in this session, what insights have come to you that help you feel more at home in the Church?
- ◆ What, now, is your dominant image of the Church?

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION

"We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church". Catholic faith recognises that the Church is essential to God's plan of salvation. Today, however, many people are dissatisfied with aspects of the Church. This is not unrealistic – Vatican II's call for "renewal" was an acknowledgment that the Church can improve its response to God's call.

What image do we have of the Church? Does it seem a big institution with demanding discipline and rules? Do you ever think of the Church as God's beloved "bride" or as our "mother"? For Vatican II, renewal means coming to understand the Church as a mystery of solidarity in all that God has given the world in Christ, as a "sacrament" – God's sign of hope and life for humanity.

Vatican II came together in the middle of the 20th century aware that the Church needed to renew its approach to its mission if it was to bring to the human family the truth of Christ it so badly needed. Discussion of this challenge soon led to a new appreciation of the essential mystery that is the Church's very life, and which must find expression in its mission.

God's achievement in our Saviour's death and resurrection (the Paschal Mystery) fulfilled - in a way no one could have anticipated - the boundless hopes of old

Israel. All the themes of these hopes were fulfilled in the Risen Lord. And God's achievement of the New Humanity in him was shared with the Church – through the sacraments, especially Baptism and the Eucharist.

The Church should not think of itself as "the saved", in an exclusive fashion; it is the "first fruits" of God's designs – an encouraging sign ("sacrament" – effective sign under God) for the whole human family. Vatican II clearly teaches that what is achieved in Christ benefits all people of good will. We are called to leave behind the "exclusivism" which has always been a temptation of those called to a special role in the designs of God.

This outlook is unfamiliar to many believers. It invites us to share in the generosity of God, to embrace a new vision of the Church's mission or task in human history. The popes of the council, John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II have given the lead as the Church seeks a new collaborative relationship with all people of good will in the world. In God's designs, the Church should show the human family, not a "worrisome face" but a "beautiful and desirable face", leading humanity towards the fullness of life. ◇

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