

UNPACKING THE EMMAUS SERIES

WHY THE CROSS?



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THE EMMAUS SERIES



Questions Catholics ask on their journey of Faith

WHY THE CROSS?

SESSION 1

Introductory reading

First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (1:18-30)

The message of the Cross is folly for those who are on the way to ruin, but for those of us who are on the road to salvation it is the power of God ... Do you not see that God has shown up human wisdom as folly ...it was God's own pleasure to save believers through the folly of the gospel.

While Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, we are preaching a crucified Christ: to the Jews an obstacle they cannot get over, to the gentiles foolishness, but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is both the power of God and the wisdom of God. God's folly is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength ... Christ Jesus ... for us was made wisdom from God, and saving justice and holiness and redemption. ✧

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

- ◆ As they make their life journey, sincere Christians have a variety of attitudes to the Saviour's Cross. What St Paul called a 'stumbling block' calls for further explanation if it is to become for us the inspiring centre of our Christian faith. What aspects of the Cross need clarification for you?
- ◆ Have there been moments in you life when the Cross truly became a source of strength and inspiration?

Viewing of DVD

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Chapter 1:
From Shame to Glory
- ◆ Chapter 2:
A 'Hard' God?

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

Prophet Isaiah (*chapters 52-53*)

*The passage concerns the Lord's 'Suffering Servant' -
The 'Servant' is God's people in the humiliation of the Exile – a remarkable
foreshadowing of the role of the Crucified Christ.*

Look, my servant will prosper,
will grow great, will rise to great heights.

As many people were aghast at him
- he was so inhumanly disfigured ...-
so many nations will be astonished ...
Like a sapling he grew up before the Lord,
like a root in arid ground ...
he was despised, the lowest of men,
a man of sorrows familiar with suffering ...
Yet ours were the sufferings he was bearing,
ours the sorrows he was carrying ...
the punishment reconciling us fell on him
and we have been healed by his bruises.
We had all gone astray like sheep,
each taking his own way
and Yahweh brought the acts of rebellion
of all of us to bear on him.
Ill-treated and afflicted,
he never opened his mouth,
like a lamb led to the slaughter house
like a sheep dumb before its shearers
he never opened his mouth. ✧

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

- ◆ In your experience, what interpretation of the Cross has been most emphasised – as an atonement demanded by God's justice, or as the expression of divine mercy and generosity?
- ◆ Is a new understanding of the significance of the Cross in God's designs becoming more clear for you? What is important for you in this new understanding?

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SESSION 2

Introductory reading

Gospel of John (12:23-28)

In this passage the Saviour speaks of the meaning of his approaching death in the designs of God.

Now the hour has come
for the Son of Man to be glorified.
In truth I tell you,
unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies,
it remains a single grain;
but if it dies
it yields a rich harvest.
Anyone who loves his life loses it;
anyone who hates his life in this world
will keep it for eternal life.
Whoever serves me, must follow me,
and my servant will be with me wherever I am.
If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him.
Now my soul is troubled.
What shall I say:
Father, save me from this hour?
But it is for this very reason that I have come to this hour.

Father, glorify your name ...
Now sentence is being passed on this world;
now the prince of this world is to be driven out.
And when I am lifted up from the earth,
I shall draw all people to myself. ✧

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

- ◆ Has what we have seen in the first session changed your attitude to the Cross? If so, in what way?
- ◆ Sometimes the crucifix is displayed on the outside of Church buildings. Do you think this is wise in today's world?

Viewing of DVD

- ◆ Chapter 3:
Lessons of History
- ◆ Chapter 4:
Interpreting the Biblical Themes
- ◆ Chapter 5:
The Paschal Mystery and the 'Logic of Love'

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

An alternative reading is provided on pages 22-23

An instructions of St John Chrysostom to the Catechumens (4th century)

Let us go back to the ancient account of what took place in Egypt, where Christ's blood is foreshadowed. Moses said: 'Sacrifice a lamb ... and smear the doors with its blood'. What does this mean? Can the blood of a sheep without reason save those who are endowed with reason? 'Yes' Moses replies, not because it is blood, but because it is the figure of the Lord's blood.

Do you wish to learn from another source the power of this blood? See where it began to flow, from what spring it flowed down from the Cross, from the Master's side ... The gospel relates that when Christ had died and was still hanging on the cross, the soldier approached him and pierced his side with the spear, and at once there came out water and blood. One was the symbol of baptism, the other of the (eucharistic) mysteries. That soldier, then, pierced his side; he breached the wall of the holy temple, and I found the treasure and acquired the wealth. Similarly with the lamb. The Jews slaughtered it in sacrifice, and I gathered the fruit of that sacrifice - salvation.

I said that baptism and the (eucharistic) mysteries were symbolised in that blood and water. It is from these two that the holy Church has been born 'by the washing

of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit' – by baptism and the mysteries. Now the symbols of baptism and the mysteries came from his side. It was from his side, then, that Christ formed the Church, as from the side of Adam he formed Eve.

Have you seen how Christ has united his bride to himself? Have you seen with what kind of food he feeds us all? ... As a woman feeds her child with her own blood and milk, so too Christ himself continually feeds those whom he has begotten with his own blood. ✧

Alternative reading

The Homilies of St Theodore the Studite (6th cent.)
- an excerpt

How precious is the gift of the Cross! See how beautiful it is to behold! It shows no sign of evil mixed with good, like the tree of old in Eden ... For it is a tree which brings forth life, not death. It is the source of light, not darkness. It offers you a home in Eden; it does not cast you out. It is the tree which Christ mounted as king his chariot, and so destroyed the devil, the lord of death, and rescued the human race from slavery to the tyrant.

It is the tree on which the Lord, like a great warrior with his hands and feet and his divine side pierced in battle, healed the wounds of our sins - healed our nature that had been wounded by the evil serpent ...

Indeed, here is an unheard of exchange! We are given life instead of death, incorruptibility instead of corruption, glory instead of dishonour.

How right Paul is to exclaim: 'Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world!' For that supreme wisdom, which flowered on the cross, proved that the proud boasting of worldly wisdom was folly ...

Throughout history the most wonderful events had been only the symbols and foreshadowing of this cross ... Abraham ... foreshadowed it, when he bound his son Isaac and placed him on a pile of wood. By the cross death was killed and Adam restored to life. In the cross every apostle has gloried; by it every martyr has been crowned and every saint made holy. We have put on the cross of Christ, and laid aside our old selves. Through the cross we have joined Christ's flock, and are granted a place in the sheepfold of heaven. ✧

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

- ◆ John Paul II's understanding of the Cross – as 'a touch of love on our most painful wounds' – is very close to the outlook of the tradition of Eastern Christians, which we discussed in the first session. Do you find this confusing or encouraging?
- ◆ What place will the Cross have in your faith journey in the future?

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION

Our familiar crucifix does not portray the full reality of crucifixion, a horrendous and degrading execution - a "stumbling block" for St Paul when he first encountered the Christian faith. For several centuries Christians represented the Cross without the crucified Jesus, as a trophy of the Saviour, triumphant over all evil. Later Christian art in the West shows a dramatic shift, with emphasis being given to the sufferings the Saviour underwent for the sins of the world.

A contrast in the **outlooks of East and West** developed after the 12th century. In the West, Christ's suffering and death were seen as the **reparation** necessary for our sins – following a line of thought developed by St Anselm of Canterbury. In the East – following the teaching of the Church Fathers – the Cross has been seen as an expression of God's love and mercy for a world sinking into ruin: the One through whom the world was made came to **restore** a world which was destroying itself.

The interpretation adopted by the West has profoundly influenced the outlook of believers. The place of the **Resurrection** in Christ's work of salvation – so basic to the message of the New Testament - was lost sight of. And, as the **Gospel message** of God's generous love for the world was seriously obscured, the God of Christian faith could easily come to be seen as hard and demanding. The way the biblical themes were interpreted reflected this unfortunate approach.

In our day, Vatican II has stressed the theme of **the Paschal Mystery**: Christ's death and resurrection are an expression of divine love and generosity. God comes to share our human condition and experience, that in our flesh and blood – through the Resurrection - God's final masterpiece may be brought forth: a healed, restored and glorified humanity.

Appreciation of the "**logic of love**" finding expression in the Paschal Mystery can bring renewal of our faith and hope, inspiring a new relationship with God. This is confirmed by the teaching of John Paul II. ✧

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