

## LESSON 10: The Church's Mission



<b>FOCUS</b>	Mission of the Church (Evangelisation, Inter-religious Dialogue)
<b>REFERENCE</b>	<i>The Christian Story</i> (Chapter 28, p.113-116)
<b>GLOSSARY</b>	Grace; Mission; Salvation

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### LESSON SUGGESTIONS [📖 ⇒⇒⇒]

#### 📖 Text

Read the chapter together with Luke 4:16-21 before the lesson, each person preparing a short (two-minute), written reflection titled, 'This is what Jesus came to do.'

#### ⇒ Sharing

In small groups the written reflections are shared without discussion, but with focused listening.

#### ⇒ Responding

Individuals are invited to rewrite their reflection in the light of what they have heard in their groups.

#### ⇒ Discussion

- How did listening to others increase or clarify your understanding of the mission of Jesus?
  - How does dialogue help us to arrive at a clearer expression of truth?
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### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Have you ever spoken to people of another religion? Do you find some things attractive about their religion?
- Have you ever found something in another religion confirming you in your own religious beliefs or practices?
- How can the Church be Good News in today's world? Has it ever been in any sense, in your experience, bad news? (See *The Christian Story*, p 63)



## Lesson Materials

### The Church's Mission

Jesus lived in one place and time as an individual person. He continues his visible presence in the Spirit in all places and times as a community, the Church. Let's first explore the parallels between the life of this community and the life of Jesus.

#### *✂ The Church's life follows the pattern of Christ's life*

The community called Church is an extension of the life of Jesus, or so it is called to be. The Church's life therefore seeks to follow the same pattern as we find in Jesus' life. There are again the two basic movements:

- ❖ A movement from God into the world: the Church, as Jesus was, is sent into the world, animated by the Spirit.
- ❖ A movement from the world back to God: Creation is transformed and drawn into God through Christ in the Church.

Just as the Spirit animated Jesus from the time of his birth, so the same Spirit is present in the Christian community in a special way through baptism. We can think of baptism as birth into a universe that knows no boundaries of space and time because it celebrates a new life of grace. In Part II we described *grace* as the presence of the Holy Spirit in the person, gently thrusting him or her towards God and neighbour. So grace continues what began in the Incarnation of Jesus in a tangible way – God living among us in the ordinariness of our human lives. As the words of the Mass say, 'we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity'. 'Christening', an old word for baptism, makes sense in this context. And it also gives more meaning to those words of Christ: "I am with you always, even to the end of time" (Matthew 28:20).

Baptism is a call to share Christ's life in a special way. But the baptised doesn't become a solo Christian. He or she becomes part of a community, the Church that is animated by the Spirit. So each Baptism brings new life not just to the individual Christian but also to the Church.

#### *✂ The Body of Christ continues to bring God's Good News to all*

Just as Jesus' presence brought God's Good News, and was that News, so the Church is challenged to bring, and be, the same. The Church is called to be in the world creating the signs of the realm of God, and acting as a visible sign of God's gracious will to save or liberate all people.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was visibly present through the body of a single human being. Nowadays, he is present through the body of a community, the Church. Just as Jesus called the first disciples to be the start of the Church, so he calls the baptised to be part of this Body, and to play an active part in his *mission* of evangelisation – which means to bring Good News as Jesus did. This is the Church's proper mission - to bring and be Good News, but just as the sign does not exhaust the reality to which it points, so, neither the mission we are describing, nor the Kingdom of God is confined to the visible Church.

## *Dialogue is an essential dimension of the Church's evangelising mission*

In Chapter 15, we briefly touched on the Christian attitude to other religions. Before the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the Catholic Church, generally, spoke negatively of other religions. Invoking the argument that there was no salvation outside the Church, it regarded as false all religions that did not explicitly believe that Jesus is the one Saviour of humankind. Vatican II brought a new way of thinking about other religions into the official language of the Church:

*Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation. Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life.*

While this may sound patronising to sensitive ears, it marks a first step in a commitment to appreciation and dialogue. In another document, addressing the relationship between the Church and other religions, the Council went further to acknowledge the many positive things to be found in them:

*The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all humankind. Yet she proclaims and is duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2Corinthians 5:18-19), human beings find the fullness of their religious life. The Church therefore urges her sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.*

The discussion and collaboration advocated among people of all religions is now regarded as an essential dimension of the Church's evangelising mission, and, therefore, the responsibility of every one of its members:

Members of religions in so far as they respond to God's call are related to the Church as the sacrament in which the Kingdom is present in mystery. Through dialogue the Church seeks to uncover the rays of that Truth which enlightens all people and which are found in individuals and the religious traditions of humankind. On the other hand the beliefs and some of the practices of other religions stimulate the Church to examine more closely her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of revelation which she has received for the good of all humankind.

Dialogue helps people of one religion to discover the worth in another. It helps the two to grow in a relationship of truth through sharing their particular spiritual treasures. Thus, the Church seeks a dialogue with members of other religions, not only to share with them the Good News, but also to be evangelised by the Holy Spirit who is at work in them.

Inter-religious dialogue becomes ever more a necessity in a world that understandably regards religion with some suspicion, and places at its door the cause of many deep civil and international conflicts. The well-being of religion, and its ability to influence positively the course of history depends on such dialogue. To unpack this activity a little, we can identify four forms:

- ❖ The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations
- ❖ The dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people
- ❖ The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values
- ❖ The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute

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### **Grace**

Grace is God's help or favour. But it is not something external to God that can be contained or measured. Grace is the very life or energy of God that is made freely available to human beings. Gratitude – the word comes from the same root as grace – is the appropriate response to God's loving, generous, free and totally unexpected and undeserved relations with human beings.

### **Mission**

A mission is a task one receives from another, since it implies that one is sent. God sends Jesus to announce the Good News of the Kingdom, and Jesus sends the Church to continue proclaiming this message through the centuries.

### **Salvation**

The liberation of the human person from a situation of oppression to a new experience of freedom is variously called 'salvation' or 'redemption'. The idea of salvation suggests healing or making whole – a process, rather than a definitive act, which is the sense that 'redemption' (buying back) gives. The Church has never formulated a definitive of salvation or redemption, rather allowing theology to be enriched by these different ways of looking at the significance of the life and action of Jesus in human history.

## LESSON 11: The Paschal Mystery



<b>FOCUS</b>	The Transformation of the Universe
<b>REFERENCE</b>	<i>The Christian Story</i> (Chapter 29, p. 117-118)
<b>GLOSSARY</b>	Paschal Mystery, Body of Christ

### LESSON SUGGESTIONS [⇒📖⇒⇒⇒]

#### ⇒ Presentation

Unpack the idea of Passover or Pasch from which the title of the lesson comes. One way of doing this would be to present the following table, inviting learners to suggest the items in the right hand column.

WHO OR WHAT IS PASSING OVER	FROM	TO	COMMENT
seed	planting (burial)	germination, flower & fruit	Note that there is always a passage to new life, more life, abundant life
Israel	Egypt (slavery)	Canaan (freedom)	
Jesus	death	the risen life	
We and the Universe	sin & confusion	integrity & peace	
	the world of space & time	a new heaven and a new earth	
<b>BAPTISM IS THE SYMBOL OF OUR PASSING OVER</b>			

#### 📖 Text

Read the chapter.

#### ⇒ Reflection

The Paschal Mystery is a paradox. Explore what this means. Para-lllel lines are lines which run straight next to each other but never meet. A para-dox is two teachings or ideas whose meanings seem not to agree, yet both are true. Here are a few references to think of:

- Even though he dies he will live (John 11:25)
- Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies.... (John 12:24)
- Anyone who loves his life loses it; ...anyone who hates his life will keep it (Jn 12:25)
- It is in dying that we are born to eternal life (St Francis of Assisi)

⇒ **Reflection**

Say the Lord's Prayer. Note the words "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". Doing God's will is our call to 'bury' ourselves in the way of God so that we may rise into the life of God.

⇒ **Response**

Using any art medium express an understanding of the Paschal Mystery, the transition or transformation of the Universe from the world of space and time to 'a new heaven and a new earth'.

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**QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION**

- What do you think it means to God's will as it is (done) in heaven? Can you relate this to some personal experiences of self-sacrifice?
- How do the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit participate in the Paschal Mystery?

## Lesson Materials



# The Paschal Mystery

## *Doing the Father's will involves self-sacrifice*

Just as Jesus had to travel the path of suffering, even to the point of death, so his followers have to accept suffering and self-sacrifice too. Jesus and his followers are sometimes called to be like the scapegoat, which cleanses the community of Israel by being expelled into the desert bearing the nation's guilt (Leviticus 16). That is the cost of doing the Father's will in a sinful world. But that is not the whole pattern. Jesus' cross shows us that when we make sacrifices in order to do God's will, the suffering doesn't destroy us: it destroys the hold that sinfulness has over us (Philippians 2:12-13). This is how Jesus empowers his followers to continue the process of salvation. Grace empowers us to face self-sacrifice with confidence that God is in charge, no matter how things appear. And God does not let us down. As we develop the habit of dying-to-self in order to do God's will, we find that we become not more and more dead but more and more truly alive. This paradox is the Paschal Mystery, the classic illustration of which is, of course, the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus.

Few Christians are called to die dramatically like Jesus did, but all Christians are called to live like Jesus: to develop the habit of trustfully surrendering to God's will in all things. When our death comes, whether it's painful or peaceful, what it asks is a final, trustful surrender to God, prepared for by a lifetime habit of trustful surrender.

Just as Jesus and his followers are called to live a life of dying to self for the life of others, so the Church, as a whole, is called. Belonging to the Church is not an escape into comfort, but a challenge to allow oneself to be transformed into Christ, and, in Christ, to transform the world.

## *The Father continues to renew all things in Christ*

Just as death was not the end of the story for Jesus, neither is death the end for us. Jesus' path of trustful surrender to the Father's will was not in vain. The Father showed this by raising Jesus from death. So we are confident that by following Jesus' path, we too can look forward to being raised from death by the Father. Our resurrection is part of the Father's Plan to transform the whole Universe in Christ. This process of transformation was revealed in the Resurrection of Jesus. It continues through the Church with the transformation that happens in us and around us. A simple way to think of this transformation is that God is making the world grow more and more truly human, more and more just, more and more what it was created to be.

## *Through the Spirit Christ continues to lead Creation to its fulfilment*

Just as the first disciples' experience of the Risen Jesus united them in a new and deeper way to him and to one another, so Christians' experience of sharing his resurrection will unite them – and, through them, all Creation – in a new and deeper way. This will be the completion of a lifelong process of becoming more and more united to Christ by sharing the same Spirit. The Church – and, through it, all Creation – is destined to belong to Christ as completely as a body belongs to its head.

We could also look at it this way, using the symbol of the heart. In the new, transformed Creation, the Spirit is the life-blood of the Body of Christ, and so all beings united in him share the same heart, the same love, which is the life of God. God promises this in these very terms through the prophet Ezekiel: “I will give you a new heart.”(36:26)

Just as Jesus returned to his Father, we too are destined to return to oneness with our Creator. Jesus’ ascension was the visible sign of the return of the Universe to God. This union is the fulfilment of God’s Plan, the final end towards which we’re moving. It is the completion and fulfilment of God’s creative evolutionary design, which began to unfold in Genesis with the words, “Let there be...” Through the countless aeons of history, God’s creation has been involved in a process of becoming so that, finally, it can respond to the invitation, “Look, my banquet is all prepared... Come to the wedding.” (Matthew 22:4).

Who prepares this banquet? Where Christ has gone ahead, his Body the Church is drawn, bringing all that the Spirit has transformed (Colossians 1:18-20). All human work is valuable: whatever we create will shape the new heaven and the new earth, as does the eucharistic bread and wine.

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### **Body of Christ**

The description ‘Body of Christ’ used for the Church emphasises its unity in Christ. This unity is symbolised and made effective by the Church’s members sharing in the Eucharist, the sacrament of Christ’s Life, or Body-and-Blood. The description also points to the Church as the visible presence of Christ in the world.

### **Paschal Mystery**

Pasch is another name for Passover. The Paschal Mystery refers in the first place to the experience of Jesus in his death and resurrection to new life – his Passover from the world of space and time to the ‘new heaven and earth’. Christians are initiated into this mystery through their baptism.



## LESSON 12: The Church in the World



**REFERENCE** *The Christian Story* (Chapter 30, p. 119-121)

**FOCUS** Community Serving Humanity (Priest, prophet, leader roles)

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### LESSON SUGGESTIONS [⇒ 📖 ⇒ ⇒]

#### ⇒ **Exploration**

Ask learners to look up the following biblical references: Leviticus 4:3-5; 1 Samuel 16:13; 1 Kings 19:16; 1 Chronicles 16:22; Psalm 132:10; Psalm 105:15. They take note of who in Israel was anointed. (Prophet, priests and kings)

#### 📖 **Text**

You could divide the class into three or six groups and assign one of the three roles to read on p 119-120: the priestly task, the prophetic, and leadership roles.

#### ⇒ **Response**

Remind the learners that the Church is wider than the visible structure. (See chapter 15, p 67.). Jesus said: “Anyone who is not against us is for us.” (Mark 9:40) Ask each group to identify people, either in the visible Church or beyond its borders, who perform in society the role they have read about.

OR

Ask individuals to identify these roles – maybe only in small ways – in their own lives.

#### ⇒ **Presentation**

Show how the three roles come together in the mission of Jesus.

PROPHET (Jn 18:37)

PRIEST (Jn 3:17)

LEADER (Mt 20:28)

Since the mission of the Church is the mission of Jesus, the same three roles are performed by the Body of Christ, the Church. The roles are manifested in the following activities. The words in italics are Greek words used in the Bible to describe these functions:

PROPHETIC *kerygma* – proclaiming, preaching, heralding; *didache* - teaching, catechesis

PRIESTLY *leitourgia* – liturgy, worship, prayer, sacrifice

LEADERSHIP *koinonia* – fellowship; *diakonia* - service

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### **FURTHER SUGGESTION**

Present the following understanding of the three roles applied to different institutions within the Church. The ideas come from Cardinal Henry Newman, a 19<sup>th</sup> century theologian and writer.

- The PROPHET function in the Church is located in the universities and schools of theology. When unchecked by the other two, it leads to arid intellectualism.
- The PRIEST function resides in the SACRAMENTAL dimension of the Church located in the parish. Its distortion is superstition.
- The function of KING or LEADER resides typically in the hierarchy. When unchecked, ambition and tyranny can arise.

## Lesson Materials



# The Church in the World

We've looked at the Church from God's point of view. Now let's look at it from the world's point of view. What does the Church offer the world?

## The Church is a servant to humanity

It has become traditional to see three tasks or roles for the Church in the world: a priestly, a prophetic, and a leadership one. This may sound very grand and privileged, but actually all three are ways of serving humanity. At least, that is how Jesus lived them, and it is his roles that the Church is asked to continue in the world today. Let's take them one by one.

- ❖ *The priestly task of all Christians is to offer themselves to God, trusting God to make their self-sacrifices fruitful, and to offer all that they touch, inviting God's blessing and grace.*

The *priestly task* of all Christians can be summed up in the word 'offering': Christians are called to offer themselves to God together with all they touch for the sanctification of the world. Whenever they offer to God effort and self-sacrifice to bring about his Reign in the world, whenever they offer to God the people and efforts they associate with to invite his blessing and grace, they are serving humanity by uniting it more closely with God. Each Christian has a unique part to play in this priestly task of the Church. No one else can make *myself-sacrifices*; and if I don't pray for the people and projects I have contact with, who will? Ordained priests have a special role to play in the Church's priestly task, offering sanctification through sacramental celebration. But the point here is that all share in this task.

- ❖ *The prophetic task is to speak God's mind in a particular context, either in words or in actions that speak louder than words.*

The *prophetic task* of the Church is to speak out God's Word for our time, our situation, our context. We could describe it as speaking the mind of God here and now. There are times and situations in which each Christian is called to speak out in God's name, either in word or in action. Sometimes this is called 'standing up and being counted'. This can be difficult and unpopular. But there are also times when it can be a great pleasure – when God's message brings people relief and hope and upliftment. But whether it's difficult or pleasant, the Church's prophetic task is always a service to people because it puts them in touch with God's living will; and often it is a special service to the voiceless and the oppressed. Again, there are Christians who have accepted especially important prophetic ministries, like bishops and teachers and Justice-and-Peace workers. But the point here is that all have their own part, which no one else can do.

The prophetic voice of the Church needs to be credible in order to be heard; otherwise it is a voice against the world, and not a word for its healing. Paul Tillich makes the point strongly:

*The Church... must understand that the average kind of preaching is unable to reach the people of our time. They must feel that Christianity is not a set of doctrinal or ritual or moral laws, but is rather the good news of the conquest of the*

*law by the appearance of a new healing reality. They must feel that the Christian symbols are not absurdities, unacceptable for the questioning mind of our period, but that they point to that which alone is of ultimate concern, the ground and meaning of our existence and of existence generally.*

- ❖ *The leadership task is to give the lead in the acceptance of God's Kingdom, both by living example and by challenging invitation.*

The *leadership task* of the Church (sometimes called the kingly role) is to give the lead in the most important kind of world progress: the spreading of God's Reign. If you think for a moment what it means to 'give the lead' in anything, you'll find there are two sides to it: you have to do the thing yourself as well as invite and challenge others to do it. So the Church is called to demonstrate the difference God's Reign actually makes in its own life, while inviting and challenging the acceptance of God's Reign in all things. This leadership is in service of humanity because it is advancing humanity's best interests, its real progress. Once again, there are Christians specially elected to leadership positions, but the Church's leadership task is not confined to these elected leaders. All have a role to play here. Whenever we do anything to advance the Kingdom in our lives and in our world, we are at the cutting edge.

Being at the cutting edge often means martyrdom, because the Church becomes irrelevant if it does not become a force for social justice, actively participating in the rebellion against those social structures and economic organisations which condemn human beings to poverty, humiliation and degradation.