

Cherishing Life

STUDY GUIDE



Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

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Introduction to Cherishing Life

There are many signs today that society appreciates and cherishes life – universal healthcare provision, care for the disabled and elderly, the protection of children – and yet there is also a strong culture of death with a rising number of abortions, calls for euthanasia to be legalised, crime and a lack of protection for marriage and the family.

In *Cherishing Life*, the Bishops of England and Wales explain to Catholics and those who share our values, the Church's teaching on these serious issues. *Cherishing Life* follows on from the widely-read 1996 teaching document, *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching* which addressed questions of social life and justice in our country.

Cherishing Life aims to inform conscience and encourage us all to contribute further to public debate, as each of us has an important role to play in influencing legislation and shaping values in today's society.

Some of the topics covered by *Cherishing Life* include:

- the foundations for moral reflection
- when does life begin and end?
- prayer, rest and the search for inner meaning
- love, friendship and sexuality
- marriage, family and divorce
- euthanasia, healthcare, infertility and abortion
- caring for creation
- war and peace
- the responsibilities of society, citizens and the Church

The structure of the book

The document is divided into seven sections. The first three sections (Part I) seek to lay the foundations for moral reflection: **Reading the signs of the times** alerts us to the circumstances that condition our lives and the challenges that face us. **Acting morally** involves recognising moral truth and the role of conscience. Questions of life and death are particularly acute at **the limits of human life**. There is a need to ask: When does life begin? And when does life end?

The next three sections (Part II) consider a range of particular ethical issues under the headings 'walking humbly', 'loving tenderly' and 'acting justly': By **walking humbly** a person searches for inner meaning or integration, self-respect and a dignified human way of living. **Loving tenderly** leads to a consideration of the principal elements of the Christian tradition about love, friendship and sexuality. **Acting justly** involves a great number of issues. This document addresses some of the more obvious threats to human life and explores some of the complex issues of bioethics.

The seventh section (Part III) concludes the document by outlining the specific responsibilities of society, individual citizens, and the Church in working to build a **culture of life** in which the life is cherished in all its stages.

How to use this Study Guide

You will need to adapt the sessions according to the needs and desires of your study group. For example, some groups might find it more practical to have fewer than seven sessions. In this case each session could cover more than one section, or, alternatively, you might decide to focus on certain sections. If you can't cover all the sections, we suggest you reflect on at least one section from Part I (**Signs of the Times, Acting Morally, The Limits of Life**) and at least one section from Part II (**Walking Humbly, Loving Tenderly, Acting Justly**).

The sessions begin with a Prayer and a Scripture reflection.

The main part of the session is broken down into themes, with readings and questions to help you reflect on those readings and to stimulate discussion. You could choose to consider one theme in detail, or look at a few questions for each theme, or all the questions, if you have time.

You can then read the relevant section of *Cherishing Life*, either in full or selected paragraphs. You will gain more if you have read the document beforehand, but it is useful also to read it together. Perhaps group members could read the whole chapter before the session and the relevant paragraphs can be read together in the session.

You can then discuss the questions relating to that section.

Some sections have pointers to parts of *Cherishing Life* which examine the theme in more detail or from a new angle.

Each session concludes with a prayer.

Session 1: The Signs of the Times

Introduction

Prayer

But no sooner is your vessel emptied than it is filled. For nothing can remain empty. If it is not full of something material, it will fill up with air. Just so, the heart is a vessel that cannot remain empty. As soon as you have emptied it of all those transitory things you loved inordinately, it is filled...with gentle heavenly divine love that brings you to the water of grace.

St Catherine of Siena

from Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue

Translation by Suzanne Noffke OP. From The Classics of Western Spirituality,
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Scripture Reflection

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

No one can come to the Father except through me.

If you know me, you know my Father too.

From this moment you know him and have seen him.

John 14: 6-7

From the Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd. and Doubleday and Company Ltd.

Paragraph 1

What do you think Jesus means when he says that he is 'the Way, the Truth and the Life'?
What is meant by living life to the full? How is 'living' different from 'existing'?

Themes for Reflection and Discussion

Theme A: Signs of Hope

Paragraph 27

What are the factors of positive development in society, the 'signs of hope' which inspire us to live life more fully?

Theme B: Marriage

Paragraphs 9 & 10

What do people understand by 'family' today?

How valid is marriage as an institution? What does it signify?

Does it have any worth in today's society?

This topic is covered in more detail in paragraphs 118-126 and paragraphs 143-146

Theme C: The Catholic Community

Paragraph 23

Reflect on developments in the Church since Vatican II.

How is our Catholic identity different since Vatican II?

How do we see ourselves in relation to the rest of the world?

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Prepared by the School of Theology, Philosophy and History, St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham.

Has a personal morality been replaced by a 'social morality'?
How should the Church proclaim her teaching on morality? Is this her primary function?
How do we build up Church communities which are open and effective?
What is our understanding of 'open' and 'effective'?
Do we identify the Catholic community as numbers at mass or engage them in community?
Are Catholic schools places of life, hope and tolerance?
In what ways does a Church, a parish community, or an individual share in the life of God more fully?
Look at the message of the Gospel; why is it so often distorted by scandal, apathy, discrimination or injustice?

For more on the role of the Church as a voice in society, see 'the role of the Church' paragraphs 48-52

Conclusion

Prayer

There is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven:

a time for giving birth,

a time for dying;

a time for planting,

a time for uprooting what has been planted.

A time for killing,

a time for healing;

a time for knocking down,

a time for building.

A time for tears,

A time for laughter;

a time for mourning,

a time for dancing.

A time for throwing stones away,

a time for gathering them up;

a time for embracing,

a time to refrain from embracing.

A time for searching,

a time for losing;

a time for keeping,

a time for throwing away.

A time for tearing,

a time for sewing;

a time for keeping silent,

a time for speaking.

A time for loving,

a time for hating;

a time for war,

a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-9

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To order copies of Cherishing Life, please call the Catholic Truth Society on 020 7640 0042

Session 2: Acting Morally

Introduction

Prayer

*God has created me to do Him some definite service;
He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another.
I have my mission – I may never know it in this life,
But I shall be told it in the next.
I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.
He has not created me for naught.
I shall do good,
I shall do His work.
I shall be an angel of peace,
A preacher of truth in my own place while not intending it –
If I do but keep his commandments.*

Cardinal Newman
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Scripture Reflection

This, then is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name: Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong; so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; until knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God. Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:14-21

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How do we make Paul's prayer our own?
Do we have a sense of direction? Who or what guides us in this area?
What is God trying to achieve through us?
Are we trying to achieve our own objectives rather than allow God to work his purpose through us?
Are we building up our own kingdom, or God's?

Themes for Reflection and Discussion

Theme A: Moral Truths

Paragraphs 28-30

Is there something distinctive about Christian morality?
How do you interpret the 'golden rule'?

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In light of this, as a Church and as individuals, what have we done, and what have we failed to do?

Paragraph 30,

To what extent do you think that morality is a private concern?

How much does the Christian response to others affect the wider community?

In a multi-cultural and multi-racial society how does the Church understand the plurality of approaches to moral questions?

Theme B: The Meaning of Life

Paragraph 35

'The meaning of life is to find happiness through Christ...' What does this mean to you?

Paragraph 36

Here we read that all human love is derived from Trinitarian love (love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). How do we reflect this in our relationships with one another?

What is our story and how does it relate to the wider story of the Church?

Paragraph 39

What does it mean to be made in the image of God?

How do you see God? How does God see you?

Theme C: Character and Conscience

Paragraph 42

How much prayer, thought or advice do we engage in when informing our conscience?

How open and reflective are we in our daily lives – are we receptive to change?

How much do we use ignorance as a reason or excuse when our actions may be inappropriate?

How do we ensure that we have taken responsibility for forming our own judgements intelligently?

Theme D: The role of the Church

There is a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of the human person, who stands above all things and whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable. He ought, therefore, to have ready access to all that is necessary for living a genuinely human life.

The Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), paragraph 26

© 1975 Dominican Publications, Ireland. Austin Flannery (ed.)

Paragraphs 50 & 51

What is your understanding of the Church in her role as teacher and guide?

'God does not command the impossible'. What is your reaction to this statement?

How do we walk with those who struggle in their moral lives?

How do we see others not through our own eyes but with the eyes of faith?

Session 3: The Limits of Human Life

Introduction

Prayer

*For those who look with their physical eyes,
God is nowhere to be seen.
For those who contemplate Him in Spirit,
He is everywhere.
He is in all, yet beyond all.*

St Symeon

from 'The wisdom of the Christian Mystics. Ed Timothy Freke, 1998, Journey Editions. Boston MA

Scripture Reflection

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows.

Matthew 10: 28-31

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The above scripture passage speaks of the dignity of each human person and how every single part of us is loved and known by God.

Consider the times that you have put limits on your own worth or the worth of others – in what ways could you move forward on this?

In what ways is God 'love'?

Do you think that God ever places a limit on love?

Themes for Reflection and Discussion

Theme A: When does life begin?

Paragraph 53

Paragraph 53 talks about the importance of the 'soul'. In what ways do you consider that the soul is important in moving and shaping human life?

Paragraph 55

When do you think that life begins?

Identify the qualities that you think make life distinctively human.

Paragraph 57

Paragraphs 57 draws our attention to God's involvement in the origin of each human being. Read through some of the scripture quoted here – what do we learn from these images of life?

Paragraph 60

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Discuss the following statement, 'we should not regard human life as expendable simply because it is vulnerable.' (paragraph 60)

Who are the vulnerable in our society?

What criteria do we use to define a person's intrinsic worth?

Do we judge people on what they can do or their future potential, on *who* they are or *what* they are?

Theme B: When does life end?

Paragraph 62-64

Consider the statement made in paragraph 62; 'death is the loss of life, the disintegration of the living unity of the human being...', When do you think that life ends?

How does your understanding of death compare to that of Pope John Paul II's criterion cited in paragraphs 63?

How do we interpret 'integrative capacity' as quoted in paragraph 63?

In what ways could death be seen as the celebration of life and the beginning of new life?

Conclusion

Prayer

*Lord, you examine me and you know me, you know if I am standing or sitting,
you read my thoughts from far away, whether I walk or lie down, you are watching,
you know every detail of my conduct.*

*The word is not even on my tongue,
Lord, before you know all about it,
Close behind and close in front you fence me round,
Shielding me with your hand.
Such knowledge is beyond my understanding,
A height to which my mind cannot attain.*

*If I flew to the point of sunrise, or westward across the sea,
your hand would still be guiding me,
your right hand holding me.*

*It was you who created my inmost self, and put me together in my mother's womb;
For all these mysteries I thank you: For the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works.*

*You know me through and through, from having watched my bones take shape
when I was being formed in secret, knitted together in the limbo of the womb.*

*God, examine me and know my heart,
Probe me to know my thoughts;
Make sure I do not follow pernicious ways,
And guide me in the way that is everlasting.*

Psalm 139: 1-6, 9-10, 13-15, 23-24

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Session 4: Walking Humbly

Introduction

Prayer

*My children, your hearts are small,
But prayer enlarges them
And renders them capable of loving God.
Prayer is a foretaste of heaven
An overflowing of heaven...
There are those who lose themselves in prayer
Like a fish in water,
Because they are absorbed in God...*

St John Vianney

From the Divine Office, Office of Readings FO St John Vianney 4th August
© 1974, the hierarchies of Australia, England and Wales, Ireland

Scripture Reflection

*This is what the Lord asks of you:
only this, to act justly, to love tenderly
and to walk humbly with your God*

Micah 6:8

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Reflect on the words of the prophet Micah and the commentary on it in paragraph 67

What do you consider people are searching for this in today's culture and society?
Why might people be disillusioned by Church structures today? What might they be able to do to address this?
How prepared are we to listen to others to find out how or why they are disillusioned?
In what ways could we help them? Might we have something to learn from them?

Themes for Reflection and Discussion

Theme A: Searching for Meaning

Paragraphs 69 & 70

Are we as a Church, a community, as individuals, too ready to give others the answers before we have heard their questions, concerns or needs?

The story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), where the father greets his lost son with open arms

Paragraphs 71, 72, & 74

How do we recognise the Holy Spirit working in others in the world?
Do we sometimes fail to recognise that which is true and holy in other people, cultures, traditions, lifestyles & faiths?
Do we value and respect life in others as a gift from God?

How do we see ourselves? How do we live life to the full?

Theme B: Finding Rest

Paragraphs 74-77

What does it mean to allow God to rest in us?

How do we integrate rest into our busy lives and create a balance?

When we fill every minute of our time with activity, what are we trying to avoid?

Theme C: Prayer

Paragraphs 78 & 79

What do we do when we pray? What do we expect or hope for?

Do we pray just in times of need or is prayer a way a being (not something we do but what we are)?

How do we express ourselves in prayer?

What do you understand by prayer?

What do you regard to be important elements of communal prayer?

How do you think that communal prayer and worship could be more effective, so that it reflects a pilgrim people walking together?

Theme D: Caring for one's health

Paragraphs 82, 85 & 86

Many people find it hard to accept love from others. If we return to the 'golden rule' we realise that if we do not love self, then it is not possible to love another person fully. Consider the questions below in light of this and paragraphs 82, 85 & 86.

How can we love and respect others if we are unable to love and respect ourselves?

How do we see illness?

How do we offer support to those with ill health in a way that considers their spiritual needs and their dignity as human beings?

How can we respond compassionately to those whose illness we find difficult to understand or accept?

See also the section "responsibility for health" (paragraphs 152-158)

Theme E: Humility

Paragraphs 88 & 90

How do we interpret the word humility? Do you think that it is a sign of strength or weakness?

How do you envisage the Christian role of 'stewardship'?

Conclusion

Prayer: The Prodigal Son

*He is far off, he is very far off, he is a blur of a shadow against the setting sun,
He is ragged, clearly and slow and there is a touch of shame and even penitence.
In his vineyards his father is gazing at the crop, the promising early fruits,*

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*But suddenly, for no reason, he lifts his torso, tilts his head and shades his eye
And something very familiar,
A gesture of a child who has misbehaved is silhouetted against the bonfire blaze,
'It is my son at last, at last it is my dear lost son, my promising one,
the part of my heart I have missed for a dozen years.'
In the kitchen a clatter of dishes proceeds and good herby smells rise up,
But the father is running, fleet as a boy again,
And the shadow too turns in an old and hopeless way.
The boy doesn't move for he is still a boy to his father. The sky is festive pink and purple.
The father throws arms about the boy and kisses the thin pinched face,
Smells the dirty clothes and a godlike, but also extremely human compassion
is seen against the light,
And the boy is crying, but now, treading slowly the old good road home,
Through the olive trees and herbs and the starting grapes.
But in the house, someone is slamming doors and swearing saying
'It isn't fair, I was good'
And the prodigal is afraid till his father goes and coaxes his son to the gala meal,
And grapes seem to have burst across the sky,
Wine is running along the slopes of the night
As a household starts to heal.*

© Elizabeth Jennings

from *New Collected Poems*, 2002, Carcanet Press Ltd, Manchester

Session 5: Loving Tenderly

Introduction

Prayer

*And so I saw full surely that before ever God made us, he loved us.
And this love was never quenched nor ever shall be.
And in this love he has made all things profitable to us,
And in this love our life is everlasting.
In our making we have beginning,
But the love in which he made us was in him from the beginning,
In which love we have our beginning.*

Julian of Norwich
Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love, All Shall be Well, Sheila Upjohn
Darton Longman and Todd, 1992. Reproduction permission pending

Scripture Reflection

'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?'
Jesus said, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also.'

Matthew 22: 35-40

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What is your perception of God's 'love'?
What does Jesus reveal to us as the perfect model of love?
Why do you think that Jesus referred to the 'greatest commandment'?
Do you consider that love is the foundation of Christian life and morality?

Themes for Reflection and Discussion

Theme A: Love and Friendship

Paragraph 99

'Not that we loved God, but that he loved us...' What do you understand from this passage about God's love?

How do we 'live in love?' How do we live in God?

Do we really believe in a God of love? How effective are we as Church and as individuals in proclaiming this to the world?

Theme B: The Church's Teaching on Sexuality

Paragraphs 100-105

What do you consider to be the difference between sex and love?

What do you believe to be the characteristics of 'loving tenderly'?

How do you think that 'love' is interpreted in contemporary society?

Theme C: Being Single

Paragraphs 106 & 110

Do you think that it more acceptable to be single in today's society?

Do you think that single people are less fulfilled, loved, and more lonely than married people?

How do we discover our vocation most fully for living in the present moment?

Theme D: Homosexuality

Paragraphs 111 & 113

What challenges and demands are made upon us by 'accepting' others with respect, compassion and sensitivity?

'It must be quite clear that a homosexual orientation must never be considered sinful or evil in itself...' Do we recognise the humanity and the dignity of each human person, or do we judge a person on their perceived actions?

How do we respond to those whose lifestyles we find hard to understand and which in our minds fall short of the Church's ideals?

Theme E: Consecrated Celibacy

Paragraphs 115-117

Does consecrated celibacy have any relevance or meaning today?

Do consecrated lives of celibacy enable people to serve the Kingdom of God more effectively?

With regard to the fall in numbers in the priesthood and religious life, and frequent talk of a 'vocations crisis', is there a crisis or are we being called to re-evaluate traditional models of service? Are we listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit?

Theme F: Divorce

Paragraphs 133-135

How do we acknowledge the breakdown of relationships? What is the role of the community during that time?

How are we called to support people who have experienced divorce?

Theme G: Abuse

Paragraph 142

How often do we pray for the healing of both victims of abuse and abusers?

Theme H: Marriage and Family Life

Paragraphs 118, 125, 143-146, & 132.

How do you see the role of marriage in contemporary society? Does it still have any value or meaning?

How important do you think openness to the possibility of 'life' within marriage to be?

What do you consider is the Christian response to IVF?

For more on the beginnings of life see 'when does life begin?' (paragraphs 55-61).

For more on marriage and the family see paragraphs 9-12.

Conclusion

Prayer

*All powerful and ever living God,
Direct our steps in the way of your love,
So that our whole life may be fragrant
With all we do in the name of Jesus, your beloved Son,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.*

from the English translation of the Divine Office
© 1974, the hierarchies of Australia, England and Wales, Ireland

Session 6: Acting Justly

Introduction

Prayer

*Come Lord, do not smile and say You are already with us.
Millions do not know you and to us who do, what is the difference?
What is the point of your presence if our lives do not alter?
Change our lives, shatter our complacency.
Make your word our lives' purpose.
Take away the quietness of a clear conscience.
Press us uncomfortably. For only thus, that other peace is made,
Your peace.*

Dom Helder Camara

© 1974 Dom Helder Camara, from "The Desert is Fertile" Sheed and Ward

Scripture Reflection

*Lord, who has the right to enter your tent,
or to live on your holy mountain?*

*The man whose way of life is blameless,
who always does what is right,
who speaks the truth from his heart,
whose tongue is not used for slander,*

*who does no wrong to his fellow,
casts no discredit on his neighbour,
looks with contempt on the reprobate,
but honours those who fear Yahweh;*

*who stands by his pledge at any cost,
who does not ask interest on loans,
and cannot be bribed to victimise the innocent.
If a man does all this, nothing can shake him.*

Psalm 15

From the Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd. and Doubleday and Company Ltd.

What do you think the above prayer and psalm reveal to us about truth and justice?
What do we learn from the model of justice presented here?

Themes for Reflection and Discussion

Theme A: Justice, Love and Humility

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Let Justice flow like water, and integrity like an unfailing stream...

Amos 5

From the Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd. and Doubleday and Company Ltd.

Paragraphs 147 & 150

Perhaps 'justice' is more frequently today used as a word than 'mercy' – what do we mean by mercy? It is not a common word today. 'Without mercy there can be no justice'; how do we interpret this in today's society?

How do we play our part in building up that society?

How do we promote responsibility for those who are vulnerable?

Theme B: Responsibility for Health

Paragraphs 152, 157 & 160

How do we praise God by maintaining our own health?

How do the factors of poverty and social injustice affect health issues today?

See also 'caring for one's health' paragraphs 82-87.

Theme C: Not doing harm

Paragraphs 167-170.

How 'informed' are people with regard to gravely important issues, and from where do people get their information pertaining to human life from the cradle to the grave?

How do we measure dignity? What do we understand by dignity?

How do we perform our duty of care for the vulnerable and for those whose voice cannot be heard?

Much tension arises from fear and ignorance – what is the Church's role here?

In areas of racial tension, do you think the Church can or should act as a bridge, breaking down barriers and creating understanding between various communities?

Theme D: Abortion

Paragraphs 173, 175-177

Abortion has become one of the most common surgical procedures in Britain. How do we respond to this as a Christian community?

How do we 'welcome' without compromising our beliefs and Church teaching on the gravely sinful nature of abortion?

How do we express the Church's teachings with regard to abortion, compassionately, credibly or without sensationalism?

Theme E: War and Peace

Paragraph 196

Do you consider that paragraph 196 offers a good definition of 'just war theory'?

There is a very fine line between just war and acts of terror. How effectively do you think the Church speaks out with regard to current conflicts?

Conclusion

Prayer

*Blessed are the poor...not the penniless, but those whose heart is free.
Blessed are those who mourn...but not whimper, but those who raise their voices.
Blessed are the meek...not the soft, but those who are patient and tolerant.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice...not those who whine,
but those who struggle.
Blessed are the merciful...not those who forget, but those who forgive.
Blessed are the pure in heart...and those who act like angels,
but those whose life is transparent.
Blessed are the peacemakers...not those who shun conflict,
but those who face it squarely.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice...not because they suffer,
but because they love.*

Philip Jacob

© Philip Jacob, from: *Compartir*, Santiago, Chile;
reprinted in the *Power and the Glory*, the Prayer Handbook for 1987
Published by the URC in the UK.

Session 7: The Culture of Life

Introduction

Prayer: Life goes beyond death - Way of the Cross

*Life goes beyond death,
because life is called to life, not death.
That is the plan of the creator.
But life blossoms into full flower,
only in those who nurture life here on this earth;
in those who defend its rights,
protect its dignity,
and are even willing to accept death in their witness to it.
Those who violated life,
deprived others of life,
and crucified the living,
will remain seeds that failed to take root,
buds that failed to open,
and cocoons that were forever closed in upon themselves.
Their fate is absolute and total frustration.
All those who died like Jesus,
sacrificing their lives out of love for the sake of a more dignified life
will inherit life in its fullness.
They are like grains of wheat,
dying to produce life,
being buried in the ground
only to break through and grow.*

Leonardo Boff

© Leonardo Boff 'Way of the Cross – Way of Justice' Orbis: New York 1988

Scripture Reflection

Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes to the end of time.'

Matthew 28: 17-20

From the Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd. and Doubleday and Company Ltd.

What message about 'life' does Jesus encourage in the above scripture passage?
What do you understand by the phrase 'I am with you always'? How would you envisage this being lived out in today's contemporary society?

Themes for Reflection and Discussion

Theme A: The Responsibilities of Society

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Paragraphs 202 & 208

What do you consider to be the responsibilities towards life in today's culture, as a Christian?
What is your understanding of the following statement; 'the test of every institution or policy is whether it enhances or threatens human dignity and indeed human life itself...?'

Theme B: The Responsibilities of the Church

Paragraphs 216 & 217

What do you consider is the role and responsibility of each individual (each a part of the 'body of Christ') in promoting a culture where life is cherished?

Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations...and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.

Matthew 28:18-19

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What is your interpretation of Christ's instruction to the apostles?
As a Catholic community how do we foster and nourish human dignity and life?

The role of the Church in society is examined in paragraphs 48-52.

Theme C: The Meaning of Life

Paragraph 217

Therefore once and for all this short commandment is given to you: 'Love and do what you will.' If you keep silent, keep silence by love; if you speak, speak by love; if you correct, correct by love; if you pardon, pardon by love; let love be rooted in you, and from the root nothing but good can grow.

St Augustine of Hippo

from the English translation of the Collect from the Divine Office
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How do we bring the 'message of life' to all people, rooted in love, justice and humility?

Paragraph 219

This is what the Lord asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

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How would you envisage living this out as both an individual and as part of the Church community?

What might an action plan involve?

The search for meaning in our lives is discussed in paragraphs 68-73.

Conclusion

Prayer: The Magnificat

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
for he has looked with favour on his lowly servant,
and from this day all generations will call me blessed.*

*The Almighty has done great things for me:
holy is his Name.
He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.*

*He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.*

*He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered the promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children for ever.*

Luke 1:46-55 (from the Glenstal Book of Prayer)

from the ICEL translation of the the Divine Office

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***Cherishing Life* from a family perspective**

Appendix 1: Supplementary Session

Opening Prayer:

Loving Father, since today as never before, your work is in our hands, we, your family, in all our frailty and mystery, with all our races and peoples, join hands around your table, in doubt, in love, in risk, in hope, and offer you thanks in a new way. Not by being taken out of what is human but by daring to be what we truly are: the work of your loving hands. Since we, your people, are those who have not seen, yet are called upon to believe the mystery of faith, send over us your Holy Spirit: the Spirit who brings us life, the Spirit who brings us love, the Spirit who makes all we do not easy but full of meaning. We make this prayer in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Scripture Reflection: Colossians 3:12-15.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven so you must also forgive. Above all clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

- • What do you think the above reading reveals to us about family life?
- • What do you think the above reading reveals to us about the family of the parish?

For Reflection and Discussion

Cherishing Life touches on a number of areas that particularly concern or affect families and the parish communities in which they live. This appendix offers an opportunity to reflect and discuss these in more depth.

A

"God creates each human being to be the centre of a new world that is his or her story, a whole world in miniature, a microcosm. In this sense every human being is irreplaceable." (#39)

- How does this statement affect your understanding of your own life? In what ways do you see yourself and your gifts as irreplaceable?
- What implications does this statement have for parents and those who are important in nurturing life in others?
- Has your world ever been changed in a single moment? When have you been aware of making a huge difference in someone else's life?

B

"Many factors will influence a person's moral judgement; experience, family, culture, and faith community. Often an individual will be hampered in living truthfully because she or he lacks freedom in particular moral choices. The academic discipline of psychology and the study of family systems can help illuminate these limits to freedom in relation to the

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development of personality ... with God's help there can be psychological and spiritual healing and growth." (#45)

- Read Romans 12:4-5. The image of the Body of Christ is a wonderful way for Christians to begin to understand family systems. Each part of the body has her or his own special purpose, design and beauty. Each part is interconnected and interrelated so that one part can hardly move without affecting another. How has your individual identity and behaviour been strongly influenced by those you grew up with? Whose behaviour and opinions still have a huge impact on your own decision making?
- When you were a child, what was your family's main worry? Keeping up appearances? Health? Success? Money? What else? How has this affected your own values, fears and hopes?
- St Paul's image of the Body of Christ helps us to understand how unity and mutuality are possible in the midst of diversity. How can this image help parish and family life?

C

"In order to love another person it is necessary to have that security that comes from having been loved. That is why the love of parents is so important for a child's personal development and growth..... It is from our first carers that we learn how to love ourselves and how to love others in the right way." (#98)

- What did you learn from those who cared for you as a child? What did they teach you about loving others?
- How well do you love yourself? Do you really believe in the beauty of God's creation where your own self is concerned?
- What helps you to feel loved and appreciated, both at home and in the church?

D

"Parenthood is of immense significance theologically, personally and for society as a whole. This is true of family and marriage as profound human realities whatever the couple's religious beliefs." (#118)

- What sign does your parish give of the religious significance of parents and grandparents? What signs are important to you?
- Inter-church and inter-faith families face particular challenges in their spiritual lives. What do you think these might be and what could your parish do to help?
- Make a list of all the ways that parents and grandparents are important for their children and for other family members.

E

"Marriage is already understood as a gift from God and a fundamental human good, but now it also expresses vocation from God into the life of Christ. When two baptised Christians get married they are joined together by God, and the Holy Spirit is given them to inspire 'progress towards an ever richer union with each other on all levels – of the body, of the character, of the heart, of the intelligence and will, of the soul'." (#119)

- What do you see as the characteristics of the vocation of marriage? What are couples called by God to be for one another?
- What helps couples in your parish to progress towards an ever richer union with each other over the course of a lifetime?
- What are the challenges facing couples these days and how can your parish assist them in overcoming these?

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F

"It is important to emphasise that seeking or receiving a divorce, where there are serious and objective reasons for it, is not in itself a barrier to receiving communion. While those who have entered a second relationship after divorce are not permitted to participate fully in the sacraments, the Church warmly invites and encourages them to become involved in the life and prayer of the local Church community as much as possible." (#136)

- What support do separated and divorced Catholics in your area need and receive?
- Separated and divorced Catholics have a particular understanding of marriage arising from their experience. What might this be? How can your parish listen to and build on their insight?
- Those who feel marginalized often depend on extra efforts to make them feel accepted and welcomed. When have you felt marginalized and what made a difference to you?

G

"Children now are often brought up by one parent or in a mixed family with children from previous relationships. Wherever and however parents take responsibility, as best they can, for their children's upbringing, they should be affirmed in this." (#144)

- How do you feel about changing family structures? What are your worries about this?
- 'Where charity and love are there is God.' How can these words of St John help your parish to affirm non-traditional family types?
- What do you think are the main challenges of single-parent, blending or step-families? What can your parish do to help? What can the church as a whole do to affirm these families?
- Christian families are participants in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of the baptised. How can this understanding of the sacrament help in affirming those who are separated or divorced?

Closing Prayer: (League of St Gerard Majella)

Dear Lord, we thank you for our families and for all the good things we share. We thank you for the good times and for your help and strength when we are sad and worried. Help us always to share our family life with others, and to help and support one another in times of need. We pray for all the families we know. Thank you for the joy they give us and the good example and encouragement we receive from them. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.