

Joy of the Gospel – Saturday Morning Sessions
Session 1: Saturday 15th November 2014
Feedback from Group Work

All of the questions the groups discussed were based on the Introduction to the Joy of the Gospel, pages 9-18 (of the full text).

1. What does it mean to you to "give your heart to Christ"?

Group 1

The group found this a difficult question. To give your heart to Christ, the group felt, is such a personal experience and to try to express a personal experience isn't easy. And this isn't just because we are catholic and Scottish! It is difficult because words in themselves are inadequate to express a profound spiritual experience.

Having acknowledged that, this is what the group shared:

- By attempting to put Christ first, which doesn't always come naturally – we try to do this by being rooted in prayer.
- We give our hearts to God by being fully human – this was expressed beautifully in paragraph 8: *"We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being."*
- We can step back at the end of each day and reflect on, review when we have lived that generosity of Spirit which helps us to become fully human.
- We discover that we are closer to Christ when we put others before ourselves (we usually discover this in hindsight rather than in advance or at the time of doing it).

Group 4

- We want to live our life in the way God wants from us.
- We need to do our best, not do just enough, but our very best.
- We turn to God in difficult times, but then God goes on the back-burner. We keep on the cycle of returning, but God is always there to welcome us.
- To give our hearts to Christ, now is the right time, this very minute.
- We can't imagine what it would be like to not have God in our hearts. God has always been there, so it is difficult to think of a moment when we have actively given our hearts to Christ. But it is often in the very small things that we do for other people.

2. How and when do you do that (give your heart to Christ)?

Group 1

- When we step back and reflect.
- By giving thanks for all God's gifts.
- By giving thanks that we have been called forward into that generosity of Spirit that Pope Francis talks about in *Evangelii Gaudium*.
- Through discernment and self-awareness – this comes out of reflection about who we are now in our pilgrimage towards becoming closer to Christ, becoming fully human.

Group 4

- We do it every day, in our daily lives, trying to live in the way God wants. This is very often hard.
- In being with family and friends, experiencing their love, sharing in other people's joy and happiness and comforting them in their sadness.
- In being asked by people of other faiths, and of no faith, to pray for them.
- In illness: one of the group spoke about the powerful feeling '*..that people are praying for me, that God is right there with me through those people.*' This was a most fantastic experience throughout the illness.
- At work and in all aspects of life – this is often challenging, especially with difficult people. It is sometimes hard to be tolerant and kind to them – God pricks at us to do better.

3. In the Gospels we learn that knowing Jesus leads to happiness. In what practical ways do we experience that in our lives?

Group 2

- The Gospels can be complex and challenging. Good skills in the delivery of the Gospel message are very important and we are really lucky that we have got that in our Cluster.
- Interpretation of the Gospel is valuable – it helps us to take away the message and focus on it in our lives.
- We are grateful for who we have delivering the Gospel and homily to us each week.
- You might hear a phrase that you can take on board and use during the week in your everyday life.
- We are now more focused on the positive and the good in our everyday lives and bringing it to the here and now. In the past taking pleasure and comfort wasn't always felt allowed.

- We experience God in our lives not just through the Gospels, but sometimes in a prayer or a hymn – it can be a line or a verse that just grabs us at that time and leaves us feeling not alone and remembering that God is always with us.

Group 5

- Being involved in other people's lives gives us that happiness.
- By giving and sharing our time with others. If somebody asks you to do something and you can't really be bothered, but you go and do it because that is what the calling of Jesus is – to give yourself to others. And when you've done it, you feel so much better and happier.
- Listening to others.
- Respecting others.
- Accepting that God loves us, no matter what we do.
- By not being judgemental
- By the example of others.

4. How does that happiness of knowing Jesus sit alongside the difficult times we all endure in our lives?

Group 2

- In the group we shared about difficult experiences we have had.
- One person shared how the hymn "Be not afraid, I go before you always" really resounded with them. It helped the person to realise that they weren't alone even if they felt alone two minutes before.
- The 'Footsteps' prayer was given to somebody at a critical time in their life. They read it properly for the first time, word for word – it assured the person that they were not alone and are never alone.
- In difficult times for the church, and at other times, you have to defend why you are practising your faith and coming along to church. There are times when it would be easier to walk away because there are too many obstacles and too much going on and it is harder to stay; but you do stay because there is something stronger pulling us - Jesus/God.
- We are never going to be alone - because even if we have forgotten, God is right beside us.

Group 5

The group found the question difficult to answer.

- The power of prayer helps. At difficult times we felt that we were more focused in our prayer than we perhaps are at other times (when we might go off on tangents). There is a trust that God will see us through the difficult times.

- Knowing Jesus gives us the ability to be in a situation we think we can't handle or have no control over. Knowing that God is there, helps to see us through.
- The group had difficulty with the word 'happiness'. It implies self-awareness, an implication that there was a kind of joy to that. Whereas in difficult times we don't feel that way.
- If we are with somebody in a difficult time, the focus is on the other person so we felt that words like peace, hope and comfort were maybe more appropriate words than happiness in that situation.
- Just knowing Jesus is there in our lives helps us along in difficult times.

5. What would you say to someone who asked you how Jesus really matters in your life?

Group 3

"I couldn't live my life without the values my faith has given me". It's like the navigator in days before electronics and GPS, who uses the sun and stars to establish where he is and where he is headed. Sometimes it's clear and all "plain sailing", but there are times mostly when it is stormy, when you can't see the sun or stars, but you know they are still there.

It's the small things in life, as simple as the mother's prayer that says I hope the rain holds off till I get home so I can get the washing in. Amazing story told by Mary about how she as a young girl had asked for a sign as to whether she should be a nun. It wasn't to be, but she passed the story on to her son and when he was experiencing a tough time at the seminary he challenged the Spirit to confirm his vocation by providing cigarettes before he smoked his last. He was lying on his bed while on a silent retreat, when all of a sudden a pack of cigarettes dropped onto his chest. The hairs were up on the back of his neck. He looked round, went into the corridor, but no one about. He later found out his pal had been looking to get change for the pay phone, and had bought cigarettes to get the change and chucked them into the room as he knew it was silent retreat.

Group 6

- We would explain that we try to stop and listen to Jesus – this can lead to letting Jesus have his way.
- It is important to be attentive to Jesus – this is linked to the idea of giving attention to people.
- Realising that Jesus is there when we need something.
- We can't live without Jesus – he is in and through everything.
- Jesus gives meaning to our lives, even though we sometimes forget he is there.
- Jesus is closer than the air you breathe.

6. If you had the chance to choose someone to talk about this, who would you choose and why? (You need not provide actual names if you prefer)

Group 3

The people of this parish, as initially we need to build up confidence to be evangelists, and by sharing with each other we can prepare. It helps us to understand how blessed we are in this parish / cluster with the great resources and stories that we have to share.

Group 6

- The group talked about the idea behind this question. The idea is: how do we communicate Jesus.
- You go to the people and you gather with them where they are.
- The importance of good example.
- A relationship with Jesus can at times be hard to explain.
- The fact that we have different life experiences is important. We have different experiences of faith and this can lead to respect to and for other people.
- Sometimes it can be very helpful to have a person to whom we can go to share spiritual matters and spiritual experiences with – such a person may be called a spiritual director. These people are out there, but it is not widely known. It is something lay people are perhaps not aware of.
- Are we passing on the faith to the youth? Do we have a custom of formation of young people? Is there ongoing formation? There is a view that formation stops after a while for our young people.