

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In what ways have you been able to share love and mercy with others?
2. What difficulties or opposition have you met in trying to share that love? What helped you to overcome them?
3. What different ways of sharing the joy of the Gospel have you seen in your parish, in other parishes or in other Christian denominations?
4. What would you like to see offered in your parish that might help you share the Gospel with others?

Practical Evangelisation

Are there any practical steps which would make your parish more accessible to people who don't feel able to access the mercy of God?

Prayer

Father,
you have blessed us in so many ways,
above all in the mercy and compassion you have shown us
in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, your Son.
Keep us grateful every day
for your great and gentle love.
We don't always know how
to bring people closer to you
and we would rather that it was someone else's job.
But we do know that you have poured your Holy
Spirit into our hearts
and you are at work among us.
Take away the fear and embarrassment
that sometimes stops us speaking about you
to others.
Make us sharers of Gospel Joy to those
who most need to learn of you.
Amen.



*Together on
the Road
Lent 2019*



Fourth Sunday of Lent: The Prodigal Son

While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate. Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. "Your brother has come" replied the servant "and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, "Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property – he and his women – you kill the calf we had been fattening." The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found."

Luke 15:20-32

This father challenges us to open our hearts to unconditional love and then to share that same love with others. This means being willing to let go of our preconceived ideas about ourselves and others, our anger, our bitterness, our waywardness, in order to both receive and share unconditional love with a world that so needs that love.

Pope Francis asks us to think about how seriously we are taking the call to share that love with others.

These Lenten Reflections can be downloaded from
www.synod2020.co.uk



To ponder: The father shares his love with both of his sons, but many things can stop us from doing the same.

Pope Francis reflects:

In some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church's prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God's faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time. In this way, the life of the Church turns into a museum piece or something which is the property of a select few. In others, this spiritual

worldliness lurks behind a fascination with social and political gain, or pride in their ability to manage practical affairs, or an obsession with programmes of self-help and self-realization. It can also translate into a concern to be seen, into a social life full of appearances, meetings, dinners and receptions. It can also lead to a business mentality, caught up with management, statistics, plans and evaluations whose principal beneficiary is not God's people but the Church as an institution. The mark of Christ, incarnate, crucified and risen, is not present; closed and elite groups are formed, and no effort is made to go forth and seek out those who are distant or the immense multitudes who thirst for Christ. Evangelical fervour is replaced by the empty pleasure of complacency and self-indulgence. [95]

Question: Is sharing the Good News of God's mercy something we have forgotten about? Is it something important in my parish and in my life?

To ponder: The Father's love is unconditional but Christians sometimes want to pick and choose who receives the Good News.

Pope Francis reflects:

The salvation which God has wrought, and the Church joyfully proclaims, is for everyone ... No one is saved by himself or herself, individually, or by his or her own efforts. ... This people which God has chosen and called is the Church. Jesus did not tell the apostles to form an exclusive and elite group ... To those who feel far from God and the Church, to all those who are fearful or indifferent, I would like to say this: the Lord, with great respect and love, is also calling you to be a part of his people! [113]

Being Church means being God's people, in accordance with the great plan of his fatherly love ... It means proclaiming and bringing God's salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way. The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel. [114]

Question: Who needs the Good News of God's mercy today?

To ponder: Neither the elder son or the younger understood the father's mercy and so they were unable to share it. If we have understood then we have something to share.

Pope Francis reflects:

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. *Mt 28:19*). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples". If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: "We have found the Messiah!" (*Jn 1:41*). ... So what are we waiting for? [120]

Question: Whose job is it to share the joy of the Gospel of mercy?

To ponder: There is more to sharing love and mercy than preaching.

Pope Francis reflects:

Today, as the Church seeks to experience a profound missionary renewal, there is a kind of preaching which falls to each of us as a daily responsibility. It has to do with bringing the Gospel to the people we meet, whether they be our neighbours or complete strangers. This is the informal preaching which takes place in the middle of a conversation, something along the lines of what a missionary does when visiting a home. Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey. [127]

In this preaching, which is always respectful and gentle, the first step is personal dialogue, when the other person speaks and shares his or her joys, hopes and concerns for loved ones, or so many other heartfelt needs. Only afterwards is it possible to bring up God's word. [128]

Question: How are we sharing love and mercy already through our parish and in our daily lives?
