

WHAT CATHOLICS BELIEVE

An introductory booklet series



# Life of Faith

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A Welcome

What Faith Means

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## A Welcome

We all want to be happy and peaceful. We want to feel that we are loved. We want to know that we are not alone in the world. We want to belong to a community in which we feel loved and cared for, one in which we can love and care for others. We want lives that are worthwhile. In this respect Catholics are no different from other people, because they want and need these things too.

But the way in which they live their lives may be very different from that chosen by people who are not Catholic; in many ways it is also different from that chosen by other Christians. (It needs to be said at this point that Catholics are Christians, first and foremost; but they have differences of belief from non-Catholic Christians. So it might even make sense to call them 'Catholic Christians'.) This set of booklets tells what Catholics believe. As you begin to read them we welcome you and thank you for your interest and hope that through them you will receive a blessing from God.



# What Faith Means

The word 'faith' has two meanings. It can mean *our act of believing* – what we do with God's help – the habit and the action of belief. Or, secondly, it can mean *what we believe*, the set of beliefs which constitute our faith.

In the first sense it's amazing that God invites us into a loving relationship. Our response to this astonishing fact is expressed in our act of belief.



so that we  
might become  
one with God

In terms of the second meaning you may ask 'Well, *what* do Catholics believe?' The simplest answer to this question is to say that Catholics believe that there is a God who loves us and cares for us like a loving Father; a God who nourishes, strengthens and guides us; a God of immeasurable mercy who became one with us so that we might become one with God.

This God was revealed to us by Jesus Christ, who claimed that he was the one, true messenger, and that his task was to announce and establish God's kingdom on earth. Jesus understood our needs because he was a human being like us; and he also understood God's intention since he was really the Son of God as well. When he rose again to life after he had died he sent the Spirit of God to enlighten our minds and to provide the many gifts (such as belief and courage) which we need to live a truly Christian life. He also founded a Church to continue his work of spreading God's kingdom of love, justice and mercy.

As you read these booklets you will see that Catholics believe that they can find God's message of love in the experiences of their own lives, in the Bible, and in the Church. In Book 4 the Church is described as the community of believers, which is inspired by God's Spirit to live a fully Christian life and share with others the Good News that the kingdom of God is already here.

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## God Loves Us

Over the centuries, as you will read in the next booklet, God made himself known to the human race. Even before Jesus was born, God gave messages and information to people, but it was especially Jesus who told us about God. He explained very carefully that it was not enough just to know what God was like; he revealed that God wanted to have a loving relationship with us.

People who become true friends can always count on each other for help. They are faithful. In response to God's offer of a faithful love we are asked to be faithful too. We are faithful when we love God, when we pray to, adore and love God and when we do what we were created to do.

God disclosed Ten Commandments and other laws to Moses on the understanding that they were being offered to the Jewish people. They were not just negative statements ('Don't do this!', 'Don't do that!'). They were a statement about love. When Moses spoke to the people he emphasised this:

*Listen, Israel: [the Lord] our God is the one, the only [Lord]. You must love [the Lord] your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. Let the words I enjoin on you today stay in your heart. You shall tell them to your children, and keep on telling them, when you are sitting at home, when you are out and about, when you are lying down and when you are standing up; you must fasten them on your hand as a sign and on your forehead as a headband; you must write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deut. 6:4-9).*

Moses was not just talking to individuals. He was addressing a whole people. And God was offering a gift of love to a whole people. (See 'The People of God' later in this booklet.)

God's laws are really a blue-print from our Creator of what it means to be truly human in a human community. Those who have truly loved God have made them part of their own lives. They have kept them faithfully. If we truly love God, if we want to have a genuine relationship, we will live by these laws too.



"You must love your  
neighbour as yourself"

God's chief law is the law of love. Jesus referred to this wonderful gift when he said, *'If you love me you will keep my commandments' (Jn. 14:15)*. St Matthew, in the 22nd chapter of his Gospel, tells of a young lawyer who asked Jesus which was the greatest Commandment. Jesus replied:

*Jesus said to him, '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 too' (Matt. 22:37-40).*

'The law and the prophets' is a reference to the writings of the Old Testament. Jesus is saying that religion is based on these two commands – love for God and love for others. But the problem with love is that it flows from our freedom. Because we are free beings we usually need clear directions to help us choose the right paths – like 'This way to the airport.' The Ten Commandments and God's other laws are signposts to practical loving.

The words 'I love you' fall easily from our tongues – but love is much more than words. It is our actions, not our words only, which demonstrate that we are truly loving. If we love God our loving Father we will want to honour him privately and publicly; we will keep his laws; we will tell others about his kingdom of love and mercy; and we will help other people – especially those who have great needs. Jesus said, *'... yet here am I among you as one who serves!' (Lk. 22:27)*. Those who have faith in God – those who love God – will want to love and serve the people they meet.

Faith causes us to believe in God's all-embracing love. Subsequently love urges us to live faithfully, obeying God's Commandments and laws. This dual relationship of love – God's love and our love – is referred to in the Bible as the Covenant, a legal agreement signed, sealed and delivered, which declares that God and the people are bonded in love.

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## Faith - a Gift and a Choice

No one can be forced to become the friend of other people. We are free to love and respect them or even to think of them as people who do not particularly appeal to us. So it is with God. It is one thing for God to offer us love; it is quite another for us to accept it – to become God's loving friend. We need God's love and mercy in our lives, but it will not be forced upon us. God wants us to make a free choice, to offer our own love in return.

But how can we love a God whom we never see? Well, seeing is not the same as meeting, and many people have met God in the course of their lives – in the experiences they have, in the presence of others. (More will be said about this later.) If you really want to, you can meet God too. But God does not give an invitation to everyone. God's friendship, like any other friendship, is a gift which we cannot earn. But we can ask for it.

The best way to do this is to pray for the gift of faith. Jesus said that God will always answer our prayer:

*'Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you... everyone who knocks will have the door opened...' (Matt. 7:7-9).*

When we pray we should use our own words, but we might say something like, 'You are the God of other people. I want



"knock, and the door  
will be opened to you"

you to be my God, too. Help me to know you; help me to believe in you; help me to love you.'

God does not want only 'holy' people as friends. If that were the case there might be only a few people on the list, since most of us are selfish at times, or envious of others, or lacking in generosity. But God's ways aren't like our ways. On one occasion some people criticised Jesus for associating with sinners. What he said in reply is very encouraging: *'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick'* (Matt. 9:12). If we realise that our lives are not perfect, if we want to become 'better' people, then we have already moved some distance towards God. Those who admit that they need God will find God.

These booklets will not make you a Catholic or even a believer in God, but they will tell you what Catholics believe. Among them is the fact that Catholics know that they can meet God not only in the Bible, not only in the wonders of Nature, not only in their lives and the lives of others, but also – and especially – through the Church.

Some people may simply find the contents of these books uninteresting or even quaint. But others may come to believe that what God teaches us through the Church is true, and they will want to join the community of those who already believe and thus find peace and healing.

Faith can be described as our trust and belief in a loving and faithful God. How have you experienced God as loving and faithful?





# How to pray

As we come to know and love God more we will want to respond by revealing more about ourselves and by expressing our love more deeply. One way we can do this is by our actions, by trying to live honestly and justly and well, and by being generous to others. Another way is by expressing our love and thanks (just as we would to any friend) in words and thoughts. This is prayer.

If we had a dear friend, we would want to speak to that friend. We would want to say how we are and what we need. We would apologise for any hurts we had caused and offer to try harder to be a better friend. It's like that with God too.

Yet just as we need God's help to believe, so too we need God's help to pray. Perhaps we can say something like, 'My God, I depend on you for everything. I even need you to help me to pray to you. Give me the thoughts and the words and the feelings which will let me say how much I love you.'



We can pray anywhere

We can pray anywhere, at home or at work or walking up a street. We do not have to learn any special set of words – we can use the words which come most naturally to us, just as we would to any friend we love. God is our friend. Our prayer is based on that friendship.

We do not even need to speak. We can think loving thoughts or think our words in the privacy of our minds. Sometimes it may seem quite enough to be with God, to rest, as it were, in God's presence. That alone may be sufficient because it is the presence of a beloved person which overcomes loneliness. God is everywhere, so we can pray anywhere; and we can learn the habit, by means of thinking of God and remaining in God's presence so that God can act through us. One of the psalms points this out:

*Commit your destiny to [the Lord], be confident in him, and he will act (Ps. 37:5).*

Sometimes we may ask for things. God alone is self-sufficient and needs nothing and no one. But as we know only too well, there's much that we need. God is there for us. God will comfort and help us. God never forgets us, misunderstands or abandons us – even if it may seem so at times when we experience grief because of loss or suffering.

In the Book of Isaiah God disclosed his love for his faithful people:

*... I have taken to myself, from the remotest parts of the earth and summoned from countries far away, to whom I have said, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you, I have not rejected you, do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be alarmed, for I am your God. I give you strength, truly I help you, truly I hold you firm with my saving right hand' (Is. 41:9-10).*

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## Our Needs; God's Answer

God knows what we need without our asking for it. But the fact that, through our prayer, we ask for help is a declaration of our faith and a sign of our dependence.

We call God our Father. We say we are his children. In our prayers we praise him, express our love for him, ask to have our needs met, ask him to respond to the needs of others. Such prayers display our confidence, strengthen our relationship, remind us that we are not unaided, and are part of the love-letter to God which we spend our whole lives writing.

Jesus said, '*... how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*' (Matt. 7:11). Yet, sometimes God does not seem to answer our prayers

when we ask for a particular gift. This is a test of our faith. Perhaps the things we ask for are not really good for us (Jesus promised that God would give us ‘good things’). That may be the reason why we do not receive them. And even the bad things which happen to us, despite our prayer, may be really good when they are evaluated from some other viewpoint.

But whatever happens we have to accept the genuineness of life with all its ups and downs. Then we will be like those who, loving God, know that everything that happens is really working towards goodness (*see Rom. 8:28*).

In the Lord’s Prayer we pray ‘Thy will be done.’ Do we truly mean those words? Or do we always want our own wishes met?

The words of that prayer were given to us by Jesus. One day his apostles asked him to teach them how to pray and he responded with the words of that famous prayer. If you are really looking for help or hoping to come closer to God you may like to pray this prayer now: ‘Thy will be done.’ God may intend to offer you the wonderful gift of faith.

## The Lord’s Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come, thy will be  
done on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass  
against us; and lead us not into  
temptation, but deliver us from  
evil. (see Matt. 6:9-13)*

*E to mātou Matua i te rangi kia  
whakatapua tōu ingoa;  
kia tae mai tōu rangatiratanga, kia  
whakaritea tōu hiahia  
i te whenua kia pērā anō i tō te rangi.*

*Hōmai ki a mātou āiane he taro mā  
mātou mō tēnei rā,  
whakakāhoretia ō mātou hara,  
me mātou e whakakore nei i ngā hara  
o te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou;  
kaua mātou e tukua kia whakawaia,  
ēngari whakaorangia mātou i te kino.*

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## What We Gain From Faith

Faith does not imprison us or limit us. In fact it allows us to see all the way to our life's horizons. It allows us to understand ourselves and our world better because it results in a loving relationship with God which is the foundation of our lives and of our dignity as persons. We will see other people in a new way – recognising that they, too, are real or potential friends of God. This will help us respect them and treat them lovingly. Because love gives birth to love, we will want to share with them the love we ourselves have experienced.

We can explain this by saying that faith in God will give life meaning. Life will no longer be merely an event that happens between birth and death. It will have a purpose. It will also have a pattern, since we will know how to react to the different things that happen to us.

We cannot have the gift of faith unless we want it; and we cannot truly want it unless we are prepared to give something in return. Above all, we need to surrender our selfishness, the belief that everything in our lives is for us and from us. We need to say, 'What I am and what I have is from you, my God, and I offer them back to you so that you will use them in the way that you want.'

This may not be easy because we are used to defending ourselves and the things we have. But it is necessary. At times the process might even be painful, for it may seem as if we are being born as new people. We may have to live in a different way. We may have to give up doing some things which we are in the habit of doing. We may have to reform our lives. But if we truly need God we will do this. And we will not be left unsupported – God's love and the support of other people will make it possible. The experience may even be joyful, since it will help to set us free from the various habits which make us incomplete.

We all have to interpret the things that happen to us because they give meaning to our lives. So everyone lives by some sort of faith. What is important is how close that faith comes to the reality of what it is to be a human being. Catholics believe their faith brings them closer to that reality because it is faith in God, in Jesus and in the Church.

Sometimes people say, 'I don't need God' or 'Religion will get in the way of the things I want to do'. They say these things because they consider that they can manage their lives unaided. But many people find, to their distress, that this is simply not true. People who have faith will experience many of the same things that happen to people who don't have faith. But they will interpret them differently. Their attitude to them will be vastly different. They will know that God loves them and that all things that happen are part of God's message of love to us. They will be happier people because of that.

How would you respond if someone were to ask 'what meaning has your life?' or 'what purpose do you see for your life?'

## Original Sin

Why are we unable to do the good things we truly want to do? Why are the things that seem so sensible so difficult to achieve? Most people, for example, want peace instead of war. Yet somewhere there is always a war going on. Human beings are very inventive. Most mean well. You would think that we would always treat others in the same way that we want to be treated. Yet this is simply not the case. Why?

These problems have occurred to everyone who has thought about our human nature. In fact, the questions are so universal that every culture has a story which explains how evil and death came to be.

Catholics say that the beginning of all such problems is found in what they call 'Original Sin' – a break which



occurred between our loving God and Adam and Eve, our first parents. For their part, they believed that they could do without God – they certainly did not do what God wanted them to. They violated the Covenant which existed between God and them. They were disobedient.

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## The Fall

In the first book of the Bible there's a story which tells about a traumatic break between God and our first parents. It's the well-known story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The story shows them living an ideal life, living in loving friendship with the God who made them. But there came a time when they chose to follow their own wishes and take no notice of God's. Instead of depending upon God, they followed their own will. Their disobedience was a sin – the 'Original Sin' (*see Gen. 3:1-24*).

As a result of their choice they and their descendants lost God's friendship and became very imperfect creatures indeed. Catholics say that we have inherited those weaknesses. We do not live in an ideal world. We do not easily understand truth or the meaning of life. We find it difficult to do the good things we would prefer to do. We become angry and selfish. We die. These things, Catholics say, are the effects of Original Sin in us.

And the same is true of our society and our nation. Sin is not simply a personal matter. It also exists among groups of people in the world. Society can be cruel; it can be unjust; it can impose intolerable burdens upon people. (Let us not forget, though, that we are members of society.)

Catholics do not necessarily believe all the particular details of the Adam and Eve story (that they met a talking snake, for example, or dressed in the leaves of the fig-trees) but they do believe that their ancestors rebelled against

God. What they believe is the truth at the centre of the story: the details of the story of Adam and Eve are merely a way of telling that historical truth – just as the Maori legend of Maui hooking up the North Island from under the sea when he went fishing is obviously not literally ‘true’. Yet the presence of petrified sea shells and fish skeletons in high places was clear evidence to early Maori that the North Island had emerged from the ocean.

As a result of Original Sin human beings have an imperfect life. We do not automatically have a loving relationship with God. We cannot always control our impulses. We are tempted to sin. We will die.

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## The Good News

What you have just read can be regarded as bad news. But the story doesn’t end there because there’s also good news. As Book 3 shows, we can be set free of those things if we have faith in Jesus Christ, who came to restore us to God’s love by proclaiming a particular piece of Good News. That news was that he was establishing a new kingdom and that all who believed in him, all who lived according to its rules, could belong to it.

You will also learn later how Jesus Christ suffered and died for us – not because he deserved that terrible fate – but because he chose to offer himself to God as a victim on our behalf. When he died and rose again from death he restored us to God’s love and friendship. He gave us the opportunity of becoming, once again, members of God’s family.

As a result of the life, death and rising of Jesus we can find a meaning and purpose in our lives; we are also given the opportunity to live forever in God’s presence – not merely now, but also after we die.



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## Knowing God

Long, long ago, God created human beings. God intended us to share a life of love and joy in a perfect state which we call 'Heaven'. But because of 'the Fall' our ancestors have had to claw their way up the ladder of life, to grow towards goodness in an evolutionary way. God gave his people the power, the 'Life' to achieve this.

As we are their descendants our lives have been weakened too. We have confirmed our own guilt by committing other sins and by not opposing the sins which our unjust society commits. Yet the human story did not end there – a new light shone upon our world when Jesus Christ restored our dignity and destiny in Himself.

For all that, we still have to make our own choice of the gifts which have been won for us by Jesus. We still have to approach God with faith. We have to respond to God's love with our own love. Faith is God's gift; but we have to want it, we have to ask for it by our prayer.

When we first come to know the God who is revealed to us by Jesus Christ we will find many things which we don't understand. That's to be expected, of course, because there is much that we don't understand about ourselves or our world.



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The things we don't understand about God are called 'mysteries' – not because they are contradictory but because we can't fully understand them. The person who sets out to learn about God is rather like an astronomer whose gaze reaches deeper and deeper into the heavens – the astronomer will learn extraordinary things about those other worlds, but will never come to a complete understanding of what the eyes see, the mind grapples with.

As long as we live, we will continue to learn about ourselves. Those who want to know God will likewise learn more the longer they live, including the extraordinary mystery of



the nature of God's life which has been revealed to us by Jesus Christ.

They will also learn more about the remarkable invitation given to many to share in God's own life.

## The People of God

From everything that has been said so far you might think that God wants individual friendships – with you and me and various others who are scattered throughout the world. That's true. But because we are social beings God also wants us as a people. God invited the Jewish people to become his people. A Covenant of love was established between God and the People of God.

When Jesus spoke to people later on he returned to the same idea, building on it and describing it in many different ways. *'I am the vine, you are the branches,'* he said,

*'Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing' (Jn. 15:5).*

*'Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that is cast in the sea and brings in a haul of all kinds of fish' (Matt. 13:47).*

Then there is the well-known example of the shepherd and the sheep:

*'He who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out all those that are his, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice' (Jn. 10:2-4).*



"I am the vine,  
you are  
the branches"

And again:

*'I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep' (Jn. 10:14-15).*


St Paul tells us that we are 'all one body'. The early Christians were described as 'brothers and sisters' and as the 'People of God'. Now we join this community of believers when we receive the Sacrament of Baptism (see Booklet 7).

It is unfortunately true that in much of the Western world today, including our own country, the sense of community has broken down – people have become used to dealing with their own concerns and those of a few people close to them. But that is not so true of Maori people or Pacific Islanders or Asian peoples, who often have a much stronger tribal or social sense than Europeans. They may consider it natural to join the community of the Church. And New Zealanders of European descent may welcome the chance to belong to a wider family.

What does faith have to do with all these matters? Well, it's faith which allows us to understand these ideas and to meet God in many different ways during our lives. If we lived for a thousand years there would still be many things which we wouldn't understand. One of them would surely be this: 'How can God, who is so powerful and complete, love me?'

There's no need to answer that question. People ask for our reasons; God asks for our faith. People ask us to adopt their opinions; God invites us to believe. If you receive that invitation and accept it you will discover the greatest treasure you will ever find. Jesus himself referred to this treasure when he was speaking on one occasion to his disciples. He said,

*'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you*



"Blessed are  
the eyes  
that see what  
you see"

*see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it' (Lk. 10:23-24).*

You do not even have to be clever to understand the Good News which Jesus brought. He himself said that:

*'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Everything has been entrusted to me by my father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Lk. 10:21-22).*

We meet God in the natural world, in the lives of good people, in society when it is acting justly, in the pages of the Bible. Where else can we meet God? Catholics believe that God speaks to them through the Church which his Son began so long ago.

Those who find Jesus find the way to God, our Father. Those who find God find truth and love and meaning and healing. These great treasures are accessed by those who believe, those who have faith.

A crowd once gathered around Jesus. Someone asked him, *'What must we do if we are to carry out God's work?' Jesus gave them this answer, 'This is carrying out God's work: you must believe in the one he has sent' (Jn. 6:28-29).* He offered them the gift of life but they found his offer too challenging and drifted away. Then, turning to a group of his friends, he asked, *'What about you, do you want to go away too?'* Peter answered for the group: *'Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God' (Jn. 6:67-68).* Catholics believe that they meet Jesus Christ in several ways, but most frequently, perhaps, in his Church. You could meet him there, too. And if you encounter Jesus you will encounter God.

# Conclusion

You have reached the end of the first booklet. If you are a Christian it may have reminded you of some of the teachings of Christ and given you an insight into what Catholic Christians believe. If you aren't a Christian some of it may have seemed strange and difficult. But don't be put off by that. As you read the other booklets you may find that things will fall into place.

We hope these booklets will interest you and bring you closer to God. But it should be said that it's difficult to describe Catholic belief in a series of booklets because it is really a single story – the narrative of God's love for us. Catholicism is a way of life, not just a set of separate ideas strung loosely together. So it would be best to wait until you get to the end of the course before you decide to do anything about it. Then we'll invite you to send us any questions which you want answered. We will be pleased to try and help you.

Prayer will also bring you closer to God. It may even bring you God's gift of faith. Sometime, too, you may like to call into a Catholic church and look around and, if you feel comfortable about it, pray there. You would not be interrupted or questioned. In this way you may get the 'feel' of what we are saying.

We are sorry that whatever we write cannot measure up to the beauty of the message we are trying to communicate. You will find it expressed in the Bible, and especially in the New Testament. If you can, please read some of it there. For example, it is alluded to in Mark's Gospel where Jesus uses parables to describe the kingdom of God:

## Parable of the Sower

*Again he began to teach them by the lakeside, but such a huge crowd gathered round him that he got into a boat on the water and sat there. The whole crowd were at the lakeside on land. He taught them many things in parables, and in the course of his teaching he said to them, 'Listen! Imagine a sower going out to sow. Now it happened that, as he sowed, some of the seed fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground where it found little soil and at once sprang up, because there was no depth of earth; and when the sun came up it was scorched and, not having any roots, it withered away. Some seed fell into thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it produced no crop. And some seeds fell into rich soil, grew tall and strong, and produced a good crop; the yield was thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold.' And he said, 'Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!' (Mk. 4:1-9).*



## Parable of the Sower explained

*[Jesus] said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand any of the parables? What the sower is sowing is the word. Those on the edge of the path where the word is sown are people who have no sooner heard it than Satan at once comes and carries away the word that was sown in them. Similarly, those who are sown on the patches of rock are people who, when first they hear the word, welcome it at once with joy. But they have no root deep down and do not last; should some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, at once they fall away. Then there are others who are sown in thorns. These have heard the word, but the worries of the world, the lure of riches and the all the other passions come in to choke the word, and so it produces nothing. And there are those who have been sown in rich soil; they hear the word and accept it and yield a harvest, thirty, and sixty and a hundredfold.'*

## Parable of the Lamp

*He also said to them, 'Is a lamp brought in to be put under a tub or under the bed? Surely to be put on a lamp-stand? For there is nothing hidden, but it must be disclosed, nothing kept secret except to be brought to light. Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!'*

## Parable of the measure

*He also said to them, 'Take notice of what you are hearing. The standard you use will be used for you – and you will receive more besides; anyone who has, will be given more; anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has.'*

## Parable of the seed growing by itself

*He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, at once he starts to reap because the harvest has come.'*

## Parable of the Mustard Seed

*He also said, 'What can we say that the kingdom is like? What parable can we find for it? It is like a mustard seed which, at the time of its sowing, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth. Yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so the birds of the air can shelter in its shade' (see Mk. 4:13-32).*

it grows into  
the biggest shrub  
of them all

Reflect on these parables describing the Kingdom of God and their meaning for you. Perhaps conclude with the Lord's Prayer on page 11.



Did you know?



## The Fish

The Greek letters in the word ‘fish’ became a Christian acronym for ‘Jesus’ ‘Christ’ ‘God’s Son’ ‘Saviour’. During times of persecution when a ‘fish’ graffiti appeared on a wall, Christians knew where to gather for worship.

**Nihil obstat**

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