

THE YEAR OF THE COUNCIL



SHARING FAITH IN THE DIOCESE OF WESTMINSTER



Diocese of Westminster

AGENCY FOR EVANGELISATION

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FOREWORD

Addressing a conference studying the implementation of the Second Vatican Council in February 2000, Pope St John Paul II – himself a Council Father – uses these startling words:

*The Council was an act of love: “A great, threefold act of love” – as Pope Paul VI said in his opening address at the Council’s fourth session – an act of love “for God, for the Church, for humanity”. The effectiveness of that act has not been exhausted at all: it continues to work through the rich dynamic of its teachings.**

This new resource, the Year of the Council, for small faith-sharing communities across our Diocese seeks to bring us deep into that act of love. Journeying through the Four Constitutions of the Council, we can discover afresh – or maybe for the first time – just how, in Pope St John Paul II’s words

*The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council was truly a prophetic message for the Church’s life; it will continue to be so for many years in the third millennium... The Church, rich in the eternal truths entrusted to her, will still speak to the world, proclaiming that Jesus Christ is the one true Saviour of the world: yesterday, today and for ever! ***

I am immensely grateful to Monsignor Peter Fleetwood, our guide for the journey, for preparing such a rich resource for us. His experience working as a priest at the heart of the Church, both in the Vatican itself and in his many teaching and pastoral ministries at home and abroad, gives him much to share – and gives us all much to receive.

May the good Lord bless us and the whole Church on our Synodal Pathway towards Jubilee 2025.

Fr Chris Vipers

Director of the Agency for Evangelisation



SHARING FAITH IN A SMALL COMMUNITY

The Synodal Pathway has given many people a new experience of listening and being listened to, of sharing experiences and sharing faith, of understanding that we are pilgrims together on a journey. For some of you, these practical points will be well known, but for others, they will be new. To new members of the small community, we offer a big welcome, and to returning members, welcome back. Take time to read these few pages - they will be of great benefit.

GATHERING as a small community to share prayer, life and faith is an important part of parish life. This is a sacred time. It is important that you take the time to get to know one another, so always make room for the introductions of anyone new, and to ask one another how you are and what has happened since you last met.

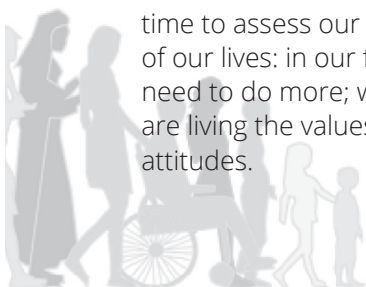
HOSPITALITY and environment are very important. You should meet in a reflective atmosphere with as few distractions as possible. It would be helpful to have a central focus, such as an open Bible and a candle.

TIMING is important. The suggested time for each session is 60-90 minutes. Each session will have a balance of prayer, sharing experience, exploring scripture, reflection and talking about how we are living our faith.

PRAYER will take different forms, and we will make a suggestion for an opening and closing prayer. You can make other suggestions, too, as it is helpful to try varied ways of praying, such as playing some religious music. Silence is an important part of the process, so don't be afraid to pause during your prayer time or, indeed, during the reflection time for some quiet.

EXPERIENCE is essential to our spiritual life. As you reflect, ensure each person who wants to talk is given an opportunity to share. No one needs to talk unless they want to, and no one person should dominate the conversation. 'Synodal dialogue' depends on courage both in speaking and listening – speaking from the heart, and listening from the heart.

RESPOND Each week we have the opportunity to respond. It may be a good time to assess our priorities and see how we are living our faith in the totality of our lives: in our families, in our relationships, in our work. We may not need to do more; we may need to do less. This is the time to look at how we are living the values of Jesus and perhaps to identify new behaviours and attitudes.



WHAT IS THE LEADER OF YOUR GROUP EXPECTED TO DO?

Each community will have its own leader, or facilitator. They are not someone with all the answers who is there to put everybody else right. He or she is a fellow participant but with particular responsibility for facilitating the community by:

- Preparing ahead of the session and developing a warm, accepting and open environment
- Guiding the group and keeping it on track through the faith sharing process
- Sharing the various tasks among the members of the group, like reading the text out loud or leading the prayers
- Listening and, if necessary, asking questions to keep the sharing moving
- Ensuring that each participant has the opportunity to speak
- Encouraging members to see the meeting not as a discussion group, but as a time of listening, sharing, and learning together

“Pope Francis is inviting us to listen again to each other, hearing experiences of faith with all its joys and disappointments, and to find new ways of strengthening each other. It is an opportunity for us to show our care for the family of the Church.”

*Cardinal Vincent Nichols,
introducing the Westminster Synodal Pathway*



SESSION ONE

Two (or three?) Popes

Opening Prayer

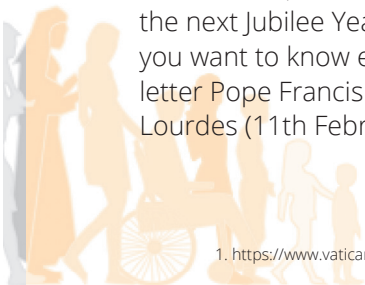
You may recognise this: it's the *Adsumus* prayer, from the first word in the Latin original. It was said at the opening of each session of the Second Vatican Council. Even if you know it, let the words speak to your heart:

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name,
with You alone to guide us.
Make Yourself at home in our hearts.
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.
All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever.
Amen.

Introduction

What's our theme? We're going to look at the four major documents, or *Constitutions*, of the Second Vatican Council. This begins our preparation for the next Jubilee Year, or Holy Year, which the Church will celebrate in 2025. If you want to know exactly what the next Holy Year is about, you can read the letter Pope Francis wrote to Archbishop Fisichella on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes (11th February) in 2022.¹

1. <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2022/documents/20220211-fisichella-giubileo2025.html>



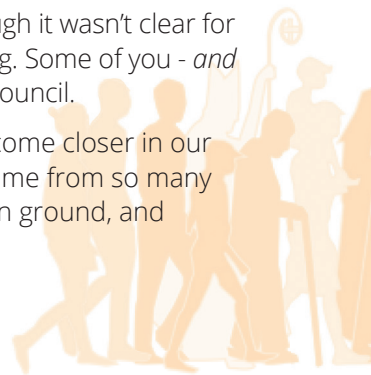
The motto of the 2025 Jubilee Year is *Pilgrims of Hope*. The Holy Father sees Jubilee Years as the Bible describes them, times for forgiveness and fresh starts, which he thinks will happen *“if we are capable of recovering a sense of universal fraternity and refuse to turn a blind eye to the tragedy of rampant poverty that prevents millions of men, women, young people and children from living in a manner worthy of our human dignity. Here I think in particular of the many refugees forced to abandon their native lands. May the voices of the poor be heard throughout this time of preparation for the Jubilee, which is meant to restore access to the fruits of the earth to everyone”*. He hopes it will also be a time to *“contemplate creation and care for our common home”*.

2024, the year before the Jubilee, is to be a *Year of Prayer*; Pope Francis wants it to be a *“symphony”* of prayer, *“an intense year of prayer in which hearts are opened to receive the outpouring of God’s grace and to make the Our Father, the prayer Jesus taught us, the life programme of each of his disciples”*. 2023 is *The Year of the Council*; we are asked to revisit the four Constitutions of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which, with the Magisterium of recent decades, *“will continue to provide direction and guidance to God’s holy people, so that it can press forward in its mission of bringing the joyful proclamation of the Gospel to everyone”*. Here’s the official Jubilee website: <https://www.iubilaeum2025.va/en.html>.

Listen to Experience

Whose experience will be your starting-point? The answer: look around and see who’s there with you. When you hear the words “Vatican Two”, what comes into your mind and into your heart? The reaction to those words can be polarised and polarising, because for some the Second Vatican Council was a time of hope and openness, and - let’s be honest! - for others it was when the Catholic world began to fall apart. Neither response tells the full story, so it could be helpful to share *why* you react in the way you do. There’s one big difference between you: your ages. I was born a decade before the Council began, but all my seminary training happened after it, though it wasn’t clear for us (or our teachers) where our lives as Catholics were going. Some of you - *and no doubt the parents of some of you!* - were born after the Council.

The Year of the Council could offer us an opportunity to come closer in our communities. How? It seems that we’re coming to the theme from so many different perspectives that we need to find some common ground, and



looking at the four Constitutions is a way of doing that. For us older folk, in theory it ought to be a case of re-visiting the key documents of the Council, but I wonder how many of us have actually read them! For the youngsters, it may be the first time you've heard of these documents, let alone read them! It could help to pretend we know nothing, so we can all have a fresh look at some important doctrinal texts.

When I was teaching philosophy at Saint Mary's College in Oscott, in Sutton Coldfield, I realised my students needed help to approach thinkers new to them with an open mind. I was alarmed by how wildly some of them reacted to the names of some Catholic thinkers and writers. What amused me - but also really worried me - was that most of them had never heard or read a word of what these authors taught or wrote.

I eventually developed my *Oscott ABC*, to help my students to approach any author they were coming across for the first time in three stages:

- A**bsorb,
- B**efriend
- C**riticise.

What I asked them to do was to read a text by the author in question (rather than someone's opinion about the author) and see what's on the page, *no more and no less*. I said it would be good simply to see what a writer had written. Next, I recommended 'befriending' the author, trying to find something positive in the text. If they couldn't prove to me they had done these two things, I wouldn't listen to any criticism of the author. But if they could show me they had done their best to understand what the author had written and to give her/him the 'benefit of the doubt', they could criticise to their heart's content. Many found my ABC hard to begin with, but a few caught on, and some still use it, or something like it. Would you consider approaching what you discover in these faith-sharing sessions in the same way? It could help you as individuals or as groups.

Here are the four Constitutions of the Second Vatican Council, in the order in which they were published:

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium), 4 December 1963

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium), 21 November 1964

Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum), 18 November 1965

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes),
7 December 1965



First questions about today's theme

- There have been regular Jubilee Years in living memory (1950, 1975, 2000), but there have been others. When and why? The last one was in the time of Pope Francis. I remember one in the time of Pope Saint John Paul II, and there was one the year after I was born....
- What do you remember, or what have you heard, about the Church before Vatican II? "Nothing" is a perfectly acceptable answer!
- What do you know about Vatican II's 4 Constitutions? Once again, it's fine to answer "nothing"!
- If you're willing to share your thoughts on this issue, where do you stand on Vatican II? Is it the best thing that could have happened to the Church, or do you view it negatively, or a bit of both...?

Scripture

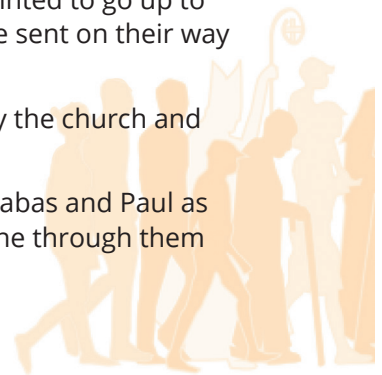
Luke 24, 28-35: "As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread."

Acts 15, 1-35 [The 'Council of Jerusalem', worth reading in full]:

"Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders... So they were sent on their way by the church,...

"When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders...

"The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles...



“Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas”.

Reflection

So who are these two (or three?) Popes, then? You will have all sorts of opinions about, and reactions to, the Second Vatican Council, but I thought it would be helpful to consult Pope Saint John XXIII, who “invented” Vatican II, and Pope Saint Paul VI, who brought it to a close. There’s someone else waiting in the wings to help us, too....

With all the documents we are dealing with, I can give you only an indication of what they contain. I’ll be faithful to the wording and order of the text, but what I hope is that you’ll want to know more, so that some of you will seek out the text and read part of it for yourselves. You’ll be doing exactly what Pope Francis hopes we will do in this stage of preparation for the Jubilee Year 2025.

I. Pope John XXIII gives us a very helpful orientation in his address at the opening of the Council on 11th October 1962. *[You can find the full text here: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/it/speeches/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19621011_opening-council.html]*



The only hitch is that it’s not in English: it’s available in Italian, Latin, Portuguese and Spanish (*although Google may translate for you!*). That already points to one change in the way the Vatican operates: there’s a much greater effort now to publish things in a whole variety of languages. Before Vatican II, communications were much more limited. Latin was seen to be enough, Italian a good second best....

The first surprise I got when I read this address was that there had been twenty (!) Ecumenical Councils before Vatican II.

Pope John acknowledged those and the

“countless provincial and regional ones, which are not to be glossed over”. That’s already a sign that Christian doctrine has developed over the centuries, and that the Second Vatican Council is part of a tradition of re-evaluating how the Church presents itself and its teachings to the world. Pope John

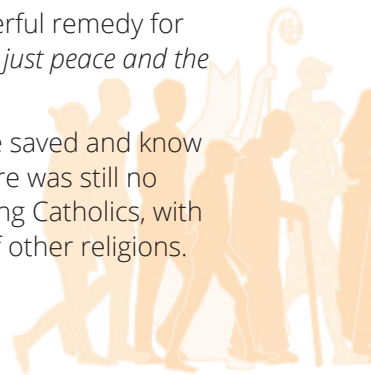
was proud of his predecessors for facing up to the needs of their times, and delighted that there was so much interest when he put forward the idea of a universal Council in Saint Paul's Basilica in 1959. He saw the work done in the three years since then as *"a first sign and gift of heavenly grace"*. Much had been learnt about *"the condition of faith, religious practice and the influence of the Christian, and particularly Catholic, community"*. He hoped that the commitment to faith that would result from the Council would mean that *"men, families and nations would turn their minds to supernatural things"*.

Why celebrate the Council?

Recent history had drawn people's interests and concerns away from religion; many bishops were either in prison or otherwise prevented from carrying out their duties, but at last from Rome the Church could raise her voice, with authority and majesty. The purpose of the Council was to guard and teach Christian doctrine more effectively; to enable individuals and societies to focus on the Kingdom of God by practising evangelical perfection, contributing to social progress, bringing out what is best and most noble in human society, and finding a place in a rapidly-changing world for the truth (*"whole, in no way diminished"*) inherited from their ancestors. It is a question of re-presenting, not changing, *"our venerable doctrine"*. While, in the past, the Church has condemned errors with great severity, *"in the present age, the Bride of Christ prefers to use the medicine of mercy"*. There's no lack of false teachings, opinions, and so on, but people know that violence and political dominance are not the best way of solving the serious problems that afflict them. While the Council will *"carry the torch of Catholic truth"*, the Church wants to show that she is *"the most loving mother of all, benign, patient, moved by mercy and love for the children who have become separated from her"*.

The Church doesn't offer people *"passing riches or promise merely earthly happiness; she dispenses the benefits of supernatural grace"*, which will make their life *"more human"*. Christian charity is the most powerful remedy for conflict, and the most effective way of achieving *"concord, just peace and the brotherly [and sisterly] union of all"*.

Pope John believed that the whole human race should be saved and know the truth (cf. 1 Timothy 2,4), but it saddened him that there was still no visible unity between Christians. He longed for unity among Catholics, with other Christians, and between Christians and followers of other religions.



For him, the Council's work would prepare and secure a way of bringing about the unity of the human race, which the earthly city needs, in order to model itself on the heavenly one, "*whose king is truth, whose law is love, whose greatness is eternity*" (St. Augustine, Letter 138).

II. Pope Paul VI gives us a gem in The Address of Pope Paul VI during the *Last General Meeting of the Second Vatican Council*, which I first discovered



about thirty years after he gave it. At first, it was not available in English, but now it is: https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651207_epilogo-concilio.html and I strongly recommend it. The first thing he does is dismiss the idea of giving a general review of what the Council has achieved. Instead, he asks, "*what is the religious value of this council?*" At the centre of his reflection is the relationship with the living God, which is the heart of everything the Church is and does.

He thinks the Council has given glory to God, first of all because the Fathers tried throughout to achieve the aim

Pope Saint John XXIII set out: "*The greatest concern of the ecumenical council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine be guarded and taught more effectively*". All this took place in a time when many exalt human beings' autonomy from God and his laws; the Church was bold enough to proclaim her belief that God "*is real, He lives, a personal, provident God, infinitely good; and not only good in himself, but also immeasurably good to us*". The chief focus, though, was on the Church, especially the Holy Spirit and the Word of Christ at her heart. What's really striking about the Council is its concern with the modern world. "*Never before... has the Church felt the need to know, to draw near to, to understand, to penetrate, serve and evangelise the society in which she lives*". This was not an "*easy-going and excessive responsiveness to the outside world... at the expense of the fidelity which is due to tradition*". What's much more important is that "*charity has been the principal religious feature of this council*". It's true that "*secular humanism... defied the council*"; but the reaction wasn't a battle. "*The old story of the Samaritan has been the model*

of the spirituality of the council". Pope Paul asks secular humanists "to give the Council credit at least for one quality and to recognise our own new type of humanism: we, too, in fact, we more than any others, honour mankind..., man's wretchedness and greatness, his profound weakness...and the good that survives in him.... A wave of affection and admiration flowed from the council over the modern world of humanity. Errors were condemned..., but for the persons themselves there was only warning, respect and love".

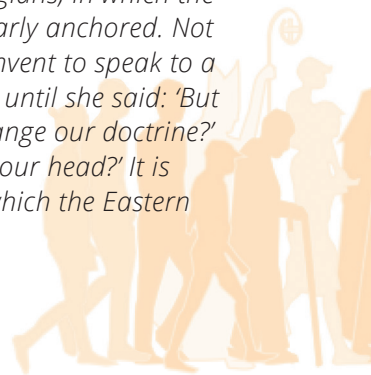
At the same time, the Church has insisted on her authority to teach, *"descending, so to speak, into a dialogue..., but ever preserving its own authority and force".* The Church wants to be clearly understood, and she isn't afraid to speak out, always *"with the friendly voice of pastoral charity".* The council's attention to culture is not a distraction, but part of *"a pressing and friendly invitation to mankind of today to rediscover in fraternal love the God 'to turn away from whom is to fall, to turn to whom is to rise again, to remain in whom is to be secure... to return to whom is to be born again, in whom to dwell is love' (St. Augustine, Solil. I)".*

III. Pope Francis gave an interview to the Spanish Catholic magazine *Vida Nueva* in Santa Marta, shortly before he departed for World Youth



Day in Lisbon in summer 2023. It was published while he was there, on 4th August. He spoke about Pope Saint Paul VI's legacy at the end of Vatican II: *"The Synod was Paul VI's dream. When the Second Vatican Council ended, he realised how the Western Church had lost its synodal dimension. So he created the Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, to begin working in this area. When it celebrated 50 years, a document came out signed by me, but which I worked on with a group of theologians, in which the synodal doctrine is clearly anchored. Not long ago, I called a convent to speak to a nun. All was going fine until she said: 'But this Synod, won't it change our doctrine?'*

And I answered: 'Tell me, my dear, who put this idea into your head?' It is about moving forward to recoup the synodal dimension which the Eastern Church still has, and we have lost".



Questions about the reflection

- What was surprising in the reflection? Any pleasant surprises...?
- What strikes you most about Pope Saint Paul VI's closing address?
- How do you think the Council has affected Catholic life?

Action

- Visit the Jubilee website, to find out more about the years 2023-25.
- Try to find out about past Jubilee Years; do you remember any?
- See what the Book of Leviticus, chapter 25, says about sabbatical years (verses 1 to 9) and jubilee years (10 to 55; 23 to 38 are about release from debt, 39 to 55 release from all types of bondage). What God wants of Israel in these years is in the section of Leviticus which deals with holiness. Jubilee years make God's people holier.
- *"May the voices of the poor be heard throughout this time of preparation for the Jubilee"* (Pope Francis). Are the poor part of your preparations, in any way? Leviticus 25 may give you ideas.

Closing Prayer

Prompt our actions with your inspiration, we pray, O Lord,
and further them with your constant help,
that all we do may always begin from you
and by you be brought to completion.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Amen



SESSION TWO

Worship

Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)

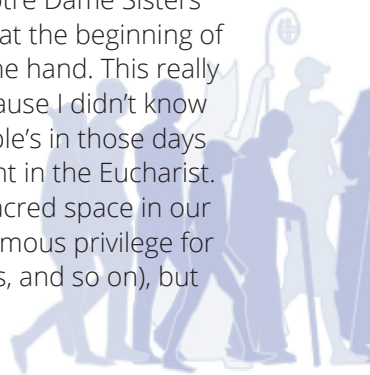
Opening Prayer

O God, who in this wonderful Sacrament
Have left us a memorial of your Passion,
Grant us, we pray,
So to revere the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood
That we may always experience in ourselves
The fruits of your redemption.
Who live and reign with God the Father
In the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Collect from the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ (*Corpus Christi*)

Listen to Experience

The way we celebrate Mass was probably the most visible change Vatican II brought to the lives of ordinary Catholics. It was not simply a change of language. I will never forget the first time I received Holy Communion in the hand. I was in the Sodality of Our Lady in *Saint Francis Xavier's College* in Liverpool, run by the Jesuits. The Sodality eventually turned into The Christian Life Movement. So much seemed to be changing around us: it was bewildering. One Sunday afternoon, Sodality members were at a meeting with girls (and various teachers, of course!) in the local Notre Dame Sisters' school at *Woolton Hall*. Someone in authority announced at the beginning of the Mass that we all had to receive Holy Communion in the hand. This really bothered me, not for any elegant theological reason, because I didn't know any theology, but my spirituality - probably like most people's in those days - centred on worship and adoration of Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist. Our religious culture was dominated by respect for the sacred space in our churches, and the sacred objects we used (it was an enormous privilege for us altar boys to handle the chalices before and after Mass, and so on), but



there was an unparalleled level of respect for the host we consumed when we received Our Lord in Holy Communion. Only priests (and deacons - but we never saw them) could touch the host, so when we were told to receive Holy Communion in the hand, I remember feeling physically sick; I also remember my knees literally knocking as the moment approached. I did as I had been told, but I didn't like being forced into going against the respectful physical distance from the host instilled into me all my young life. It was a dreadful experience, and this is the first time I have ever spoken about it. I got over it, but I am one of the lucky ones who never lost an ounce of that respect for the awesome presence of Jesus Christ, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the host I still receive with trepidation. It really isn't fear, and never was - just a recognition of something akin to what I later discovered what Pascal, the famous philosopher, was talking about when he described our human state as constantly hovering between *grandeur* and *misère*, "greatness and wretchedness".

I am glad I had that difficult moment, because it has taught me never to sneer at or even to question those people who prefer to receive Holy Communion on the tongue. If they ask my opinion, I will explain why I would choose to receive it on my hand, but I make it clear that it is their choice and I will always respect that choice. That is also the official discipline of the Church: it is the communicant's choice, not the choice of the person administering the sacrament. Pandemics throw a spanner into the works, but I hope they won't come along too frequently.

First Questions about today's theme

- The Catholic Church embraces different liturgical traditions, many of which are rooted in cultures different from your own. Which other Catholic rites are in your area?
- Is there any public celebration of the Divine Office in your area? Have you ever joined in?
- How important do you think Music and Art are in Church life?
- What attracts you to Catholic worship (if you are willing to share)?



Scripture

Ephesians 6,18: Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints."

Matthew 6,6: "But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Acts 2,42: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers."

Acts 2,46: "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,"

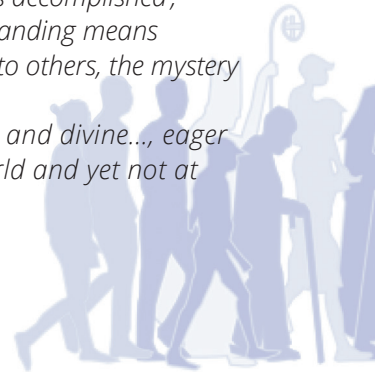
Reflection

Sacrosanctum Concilium was the first document issued by the Second Vatican Council. In a sense, it sets the tone for what was to come, except that nobody could have foreseen the twists and turns in the composition of documents, many of which went through several drafts, and the voting was itself quite eventful. This reflection offers some quotations from the Introduction to the first of the four Constitutions. The list of chapters comes next, so that those of you who have never seen this document will know where to look for what interests you. Then I'll offer a few observations of my own.

"This sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires to impart an ever-increasing vigour to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church".

"For the liturgy, 'through which the work of our redemption is accomplished', most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church".

"It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine..., eager to act and yet intent on contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it";



“in her the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek”.

“While the liturgy daily builds up those who are within into a holy temple of the Lord..., at the same time it marvellously strengthens their power to preach Christ, and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together, until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd”.

“In faithful obedience to tradition, the sacred Council declares that holy Mother Church holds all lawfully acknowledged rites to be of equal right and dignity; that she wishes to preserve them in the future and to foster them in every way. The Council also desires that, where necessary, the rites be revised carefully in the light of sound tradition, and that they be given new vigour to meet the circumstances and needs of modern times”.

After the Introduction come the following Chapters:

Chapter I – General Principles for the Restoration
and Promotion of the Sacred Liturgy

Chapter II – The Most Sacred Mystery of the Eucharist

Chapter III – The Other Sacraments and the Sacramentals

Chapter IV – The Divine Office

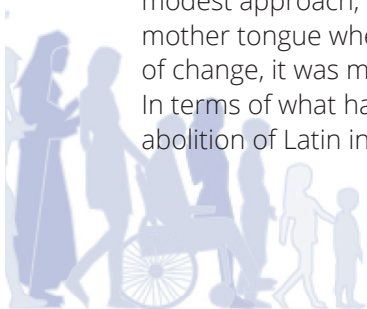
Chapter V – The Liturgical Year

Chapter VI – Sacred Music

Chapter VII – Sacred Art and Sacred Furnishings

The vernacular/mother tongue/Latin

If you search the text of the Constitution electronically for these words, you'll discover that there's no great push towards the vernacular. It's a more modest approach, allowing the Church to use the vernacular or the local mother tongue when it seems useful. Rather than launching a huge project of change, it was more like pushing a small boat out from the side of a lake. In terms of what had gone before, it was a big step, but it wasn't a blanket abolition of Latin in the liturgy. Far from it.



Sanctifying time

In the chapter on the Divine Office, you'll come across the idea that the formal, regular prayer of the Christian community is a way of sanctifying time, making the day holy through a pattern of prayer. The chapter will give you a clearer idea of the origin of the breviary and the Psalter, and you get a glimpse of the variations between the communities and individuals who, it is envisaged, pray the Divine Office.

Active participation

§30: *"To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence"*. This is from the section on Norms drawn from the hierarchic and communal nature of the liturgy (§§26-32); it's clearly an attempt to move from a passive form of participation (my grandmother 'heard' Mass) to more involvement in what's going on. In the section on The Promotion of Liturgical Institution and Active Participation (the original is *De liturgica institutione et actuosa participatione prosequendis*) (§§14-20) the word used in Latin to describe the kind of participation being encouraged is not *activa* but *actuosa*; it's not about "activity", but a more intense kind of spiritual participation. It's meant to be *"the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit"*; but *"it would be futile to entertain any hopes of realising this unless the pastors themselves, in the first place, become thoroughly imbued with the spirit and power of the liturgy"*. It's not only the external activity of being a reader or a minister of Holy Communion, or joining in the responses, but what's behind all of them. There's a clear encouragement for deep, spiritual commitment to what's going on, not just the external activities we've all become used to.

Silence

The last word in the quotation above from §30 is *"silence"*. It seems rare to find a Sunday liturgy where silence is a regular feature, and yet it is supposed to be. Our prayer should not be us insisting on being heard, but making space to hear another, often mysterious voice. We need to welcome moments when we can be silent together. This dovetails nicely into something Nicholas Lash says about silence: *"the contrary to the kind of silence*



that I have in mind is not sound, but noise” and “the contrary of the constituting silence appropriate to ‘hearers of the word’, the silence that is attentiveness - to God and to no other - is, not sound, but noise, cacophony”²; “in suggesting that Christianity should be a kind of school of silence, an academy of attentiveness, I am suggesting that our task, as Christians, is to help each other to acquire the courage to be still, to keep our eyes open in the dark. Gethsemane would be the paradigm of the attentiveness we need. In the garden, Christ remained attentive to the Father’s silence - while the disciples, unfortunately, slept”³. What Lash says here is in the context of speech as conversation, which is surely a good model for some forms of prayer; he notes that Anselm’s Monologion is philosophy, while his Proslogion is theology. I like that: dialogue’s always better than monologue.

Prayer

Now a few comments about the prayer at the heart of our own spiritual lives, but which, surely, must be at the heart of our active (actuosa) participation in the liturgy. Someone asked me what my priority would be if I were to become a seminary rector. I think it is essential to help seminarians learn to pray, or to pray better, or more intensely. Sometimes I suggest that there could be an equivalent in a school of prayer to the Key Stages in our national curriculum. KS1 would be learning prayers that other people have written; KS2 would be the prayers we invent, when we are asking (God, Our Lady, or a saint) for something - it’s still petition, asking; KS3 would be the prayer of praise; KS4 would be meditating on something, perhaps even using meditation techniques; KS5 could be contemplation. Rowan Williams has said contemplation is “a deeper appropriation of the vulnerability of the self in the midst of the language and transactions of the world”⁴. I came across a helpful quotation in a book by Tomáš Halík: “Praying, Saint Augustine said, means closing one’s eyes and realising that God is creating the world now”⁵. Halík also made this rather profound remark about prayer: “Praying means being aware I can be seen. The awareness of living in unhiddenness (as noted earlier, this is an exact translation of the Greek word for “truth”) transforms people. But what it fundamentally depends on is the character of the gaze to which we are subject”⁶. Why do I mention all these aspects of prayer in a reflection on *Sacrosanctum Concilium*? I try never to say Mass, always to pray it. It’s vital to have more than just a clue about what that means.

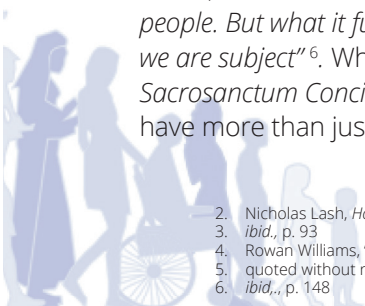
2. Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence*, London (Routledge) 2016, p. 92

3. *ibid.*, p. 93

4. Rowan Williams, “Theological Integrity”, in *New Blackfriars* 72 (1991), p. 148

5. quoted without reference in Tomáš Halík, *Night of the Confessor*, New York (Image Books) 2012, p. 78

6. *ibid.*, p. 148



Questions about the Reflection

- What would you say about your experience of liturgy as prayer?
- In what way would you describe liturgy as beautiful (or not)?

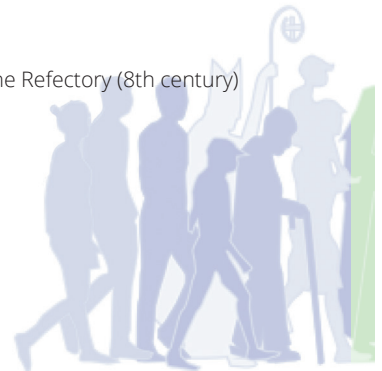
Action

- Try consciously to pray the liturgy yourself (active participation).
- See if it is feasible to arrange liturgies other than Mass in your area.
- *“May the voices of the poor be heard throughout this time of preparation for the Jubilee”* (Pope Francis). In all honesty, do poor people feel welcome where you attend Mass?

Closing Prayer

Lord Christ, we pray thy mercy on our table spread,
And what thy gentle hands have given thy men
Let it by thee be blessed: whate'er we have
Came from the lavish heart and gentle hand,
And all that's good is thine, for thou art good.
And ye that eat, give thanks for it to Christ,
And let the words ye utter be only peace,
For Christ loved peace: it was himself that said,
Peace I give unto you, my peace I leave with you.
Grant that our own may be a generous hand
Breaking the bread for all poor men, sharing the food.
Christ shall receive the bread thou gavest his poor,
And shall not tarry to give thee reward.
Amen.

Alcuin, *In the Refectory* (8th century)



SESSION THREE

Belonging

Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)

Opening Prayer

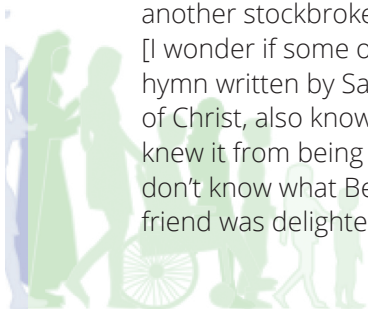
Pour out on us, O Lord, we pray,
a spirit of truth, understanding and peace,
that we may know with all our hearts
what is pleasing to you
and, with one accord,
pursue what we have come to know.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Collect from the Mass for a Spiritual or Pastoral Gathering (Roman Missal)

Listen to Experience

My father used to work in a stockbroker's office when Liverpool had a branch of the Stock Exchange. He wasn't a stockbroker, just an office manager, so our family was definitely not rich. He was invited to become a partner in the firm, but one condition was that he would have to become a Freemason, so he wouldn't join. One day, all the members had a meeting in a room that only they were allowed to enter, so the only people on the Floor were the non-Freemasons, and in Liverpool that meant the Catholics. When the members came out of their private room, my Dad's opposite number from another stockbroker's firm started singing *Tantum Ergo* very quietly.

[I wonder if some of you know what *Tantum Ergo* is. It's part of a Eucharistic hymn written by Saint Thomas Aquinas for the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, also known as *Corpus Christi*. Most boys of my age and older knew it from being altar servers at Benediction. But maybe some of you don't know what Benediction is - ask someone else in your group!] My Dad's friend was delighted when others joined in singing *Tantum Ergo*, and the



volume grew and grew. The young men on the Floor of the Stock Exchange were mainly Catholics, and this hymn had the effect of uniting them, but - according to my Dad - infuriating the Freemasons. It was like a badge, which proudly told the world that these men were Catholics.

It was another age, before ecumenism became fashionable, an age when Catholic culture was strong in Liverpool, and people were certainly not shy about being Catholic. It was fuelled by bickering with Protestants, particularly Orangemen, who, even now, are allowed to stop the traffic in the city on the 12th of July, the day the Orange Order celebrates King Billy's victory over the Catholics at the Battle of the Boyne.

The point is, the men who sang *Tantum Ergo* on the Stock Exchange floor were proud to belong to the Catholic Church and to let everyone know.

First questions about today's theme

- What tells the world that you're a Catholic? Do you keep it quiet?
- How do you think we should display our Catholic faith?
- I wonder if anyone feels uncomfortable with that bizarre story, which is true, by the way.

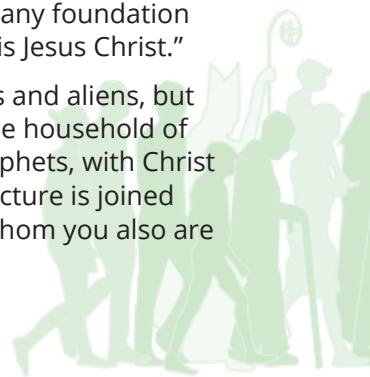
Scripture - it is worth spending extra time on this today

John 10,1-2 and 7-9: **"Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.... 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.**

1 Cor 3,9-11: **"For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.**

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ."

Ephesians 2,19-22: **"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God."**



Apocalypse 21,3: "See, the home of God is among mortals."

1 Peter 2,5: "like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house"

Apocalypse 21,2: "And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

1 Cor 10,17: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

1 Cor 12,12-13: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

1 Cor 12,27: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it"

Ephesians 4,11-16: "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."

Reflection

The first paragraph of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* is worth quoting in full:

Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission. This it intends to do following faithfully the teaching of previous councils. The present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this work of the Church so that all

7. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, §1.

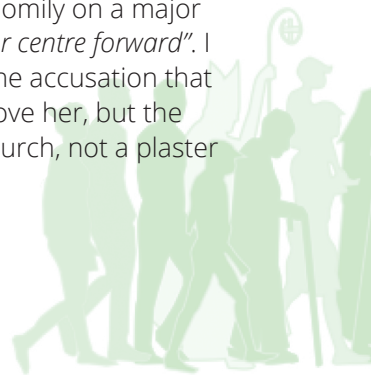
8. Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence*, London (Routledge) 2016, p. 41.

men, joined more closely today by various social, technical and cultural ties, might also attain fuller unity in Christ.⁷

Nicholas Lash is convinced that *“the key doctrinal achievement of the second Vatican Council is to be seen in the sequence of chapters in its two Dogmatic Constitutions, on Revelation and on the Church”*. Chapter 1 in *Lumen Gentium* (The Mystery of the Church) offers us a variety of metaphors for the Church; in the Scripture selection for this session you find the Church described as a sheepfold, God’s field, God’s building, the household of God, a dwelling-place of God in the Holy Spirit, the place where God dwells with men, a spiritual house, the holy city, the new Jerusalem, the Body of Christ. Chapter II focuses on one particular image, The Church as the People of God, which is really the key-image for the Church in Vatican II. *“Only then, in a third chapter, does the Constitution consider the kinds of structures and offices which such a people needs”*⁸.

A key theme in *Lumen Gentium* is the Universal Call to Holiness, which is an essential aspect of the dignity people acquire through being baptised. It is crystal clear that there’s no way *“official”* Catholics like members of religious orders or congregations, or deacons, priests and bishops, have a monopoly on holiness. Just the reverse, really: we’re all called to holiness, and it’s a call to be like God and to radiate God’s goodness in many ways, some of which are listed in this remarkable document. It becomes clear, too, that the Church can never be identified with the Kingdom of God, but is a tool God uses to bring people to the Kingdom and to help them make the Kingdom present in the world.

Perhaps the most surprising thing in *Lumen Gentium* is Chapter VIII. The Fathers at Vatican II decided not to issue a separate document on Our Blessed Lady; instead, she’s included as part of the Church, admittedly with unique privileges, *“who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues”* (§65), in a chapter entitled *The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and the Church*. In much more mundane terms, a former football-playing colleague of mine once said in a homily on a major feast of Our Lady that *“she’s not our team mascot - she’s our centre forward”*. I think he came up with that genial idea as a response to the accusation that Catholics worship her. We don’t; we respect her and we love her, but the genius of *Lumen Gentium* is to count her as part of the Church, not a plaster figure on a pedestal.



Questions about the reflection

- Which image of the Church do you like/dislike most? Why?
- What makes you feel you belong to the Church?
- What makes you proud/ashamed to be a Catholic?
- What disappoints you about the Church?
- What are your dreams for the Church?
- Who will make your dreams for the Church come true?

Action

- Chapter IV of *Lumen Gentium* on “The Universal Call to Holiness” (§§39-42) is a challenge to you to come closer to Christ, and not to think of holiness as something for other people. Why not read and/or discuss it with a friend or in a small group?
- If you aren’t sure how monks, nuns, friars and other religious sisters and brothers live, why not try to visit a convent or a monastery (only if it’s convenient for them).
- “*May the voices of the poor be heard throughout this time of preparation for the Jubilee*” (Pope Francis). The Church has been called to exercise a “*Preferential Option for the Poor*”. See if this is true in the Church in your area.



Closing Prayer

O God, in the covenant of your Christ
you never cease to gather for yourself from all nations
a people growing together in unity through the Spirit;
grant we pray, that your Church,
faithful to the mission entrusted to her,
may continually go forward with the human family
and always be the leaven and the soul of human society,
to renew it in Christ and transform it into the family of God.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Collect from Mass B for the Church (Roman Missal)



SESSION FOUR

God speaks

Dei Verbum (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation)

Opening Prayer

Lord, we thank you for putting us in the presence of your Word,
which you inspired in your prophets.

May we approach this Word reverently, humbly and attentively.
May we not despise this Word, but receive all it has to say to us.

We know that our hearts are closed,
often incapable of comprehending the simplicity of your Word.

Send your Spirit to us so that,
receiving the Word in truth and simplicity,
our lives may be transformed by it.

Let us not be resistant, Lord;
may your Word penetrate us like a two-edged sword;
may our hearts be open to it;

let not our eyes be closed, nor our minds wander,
but may we give ourselves entirely to this listening.

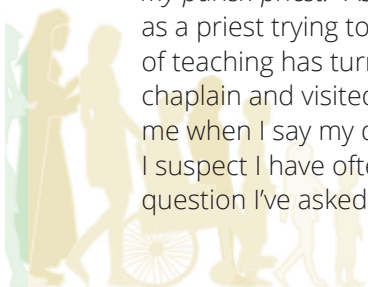
We ask this, Father,
in union with Mary, who used to recite the psalms,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Carlo Maria Martini SJ, Prayer before reading and reflecting on Scripture

Listen to experience

When you hear what I'm about to say, you may think, "*thank God he's not my parish priest!*" As well as working in parishes, I've spent a lot of my time as a priest trying to teach philosophy, and one of the most effective ways of teaching has turned out to be asking questions. I've also been a school chaplain and visited quite a few Catholic schools. So I hope you can believe me when I say my questions are really not meant to embarrass anyone. I suspect I have often embarrassed people, though, especially with one question I've asked in different places. I'm fascinated with the expressions

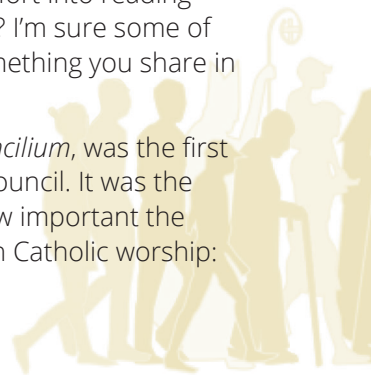


on people's faces during the Scripture readings at Mass. They don't usually look like people who are listening attentively! So guess what I often ask! "Do you remember what today's readings were about...?" People squirm and look at the kneeler, or the louse crawling around in the hat the lady in front of them is wearing. I don't really expect anyone to answer, although sometimes children do. There are lots of tidbits that would really capture people's attention, like the banns we used to read out in church announcing forthcoming weddings. I am astounded at our capacity for nosiness! People hear the readings - if they have been listening - and at the end they are told that what they have heard is "The Word of the Lord" or "The Gospel of the Lord". Maybe we should shout it before the readings instead. We do announce where you can find them in the Bible, but it's nothing like the urgency of the advertisements we see on the television, and sometimes it's actually quite hard to catch what people are saying, especially if they are faced with proclaiming (or declaiming) a reading from Deuteronomy or Apocalypse early in the morning.

One reason why people often don't pay attention during the readings at Mass is the way they are read. I probably sound like some kind of snob, but don't let that distract you. The only way we're going to be 'convinced' to listen to the readings is if they're proclaimed, not just mumbled or read without being prepared: it's embarrassing when tricky words or names come up and the reader stumbles over them; it's obvious when people haven't seen them beforehand, and it can be excruciating to see them looking so sheepish, wishing the earth would swallow them up. But - here is the snob in me coming out - it's worse when they don't even notice!

Since the Mass has been in English - in other words, for more than fifty years, now - we've been reminded at every single Mass that we're listening to the Word of the Lord or the Gospel of the Lord. They even make us join in those responsorial Psalms, too! The message is that there's something worth hearing, but we often turn it into a deadening routine. How dare we? This is God speaking to His People, so why don't we put more effort into reading the Word of God better, and listening to it more carefully? I'm sure some of you will have answers I don't expect, so that could be something you share in your groups in a few minutes!

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, was the first document issued by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. It was the focus of an earlier faith-sharing session; in it you hear how important the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council think Scripture is in Catholic worship:



“Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration and their force, and it is from scripture that actions and signs derive their meaning. Thus to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote that warm and living love for scripture to which the venerable tradition of both eastern and western rites gives testimony” (§24).

Those words were published on 4th December, 1963, so I'm not telling you anything newfangled! What I am saying is that, when we gather to worship, a central part of what we do is to hear the Word of God, in other words to let God speak to us. It's very important for us to be honest when someone asks us, “are you really listening when God speaks to you?”

Quite another question is how much we use Scripture for our personal prayer, and how much we let it teach us. Are we open in the way we approach Scripture, or do we already have fixed views on what particular passages in Scripture mean? Do we really listen with open ears and hearts?

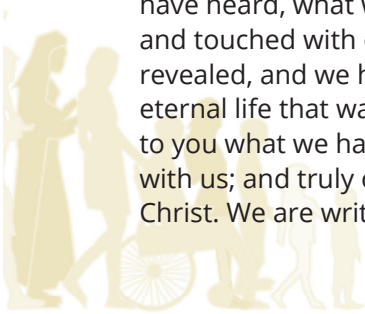
First questions about today's theme

- How well do you know the Bible?
- Is the Bible really important to you (be as honest as you can)?
- How would you define a good homily?

Scripture

Hebrews 1, 1-2: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.”

1 John 1, 1-4: “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”



2 Peter 1, 16-19: "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

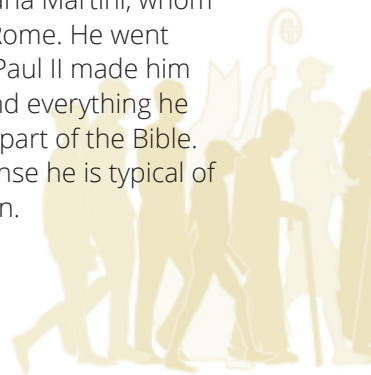
Hebrews 4,12: "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Reflection

"Vatican II gave the Bible back to Catholics. Only those who perceive this Word in their heart can be part of those who will help achieve renewal of the Church, and who will know how to respond to personal questions with the right choice. The Word of God is simple, and seeks out as its companion a heart that listens... Neither the clergy nor ecclesiastical law can substitute for the inner life of the human person. All the external rules, the laws, the dogmas, are there to clarify this internal voice and for the discernment of spirits."

from Carlo Maria Martini SJ's Testament

There's a whole history linked to Vatican II called Ressourcement, or going back to the sources of our faith and theology. Two areas which benefited were Catholic liturgical and biblical studies. It's good to know that, if only because it shows that many of the statements and decisions made during the Council are part of a broader theological development. One of the men who typified the quality of scholars involved was Carlo Maria Martini, whom I first met when he was Rector of the Biblical Institute in Rome. He went on to become Archbishop of Milan, and Pope Saint John Paul II made him a Cardinal. At heart, he was always a lover of Scripture, and everything he wrote or preached was laced with quotations from every part of the Bible. It really was the soul of all his pastoral projects: in that sense he is typical of those who lived through Vatican II and thoroughly Ignatian.



Part of the message of Dei Verbum is that God is persistent! This is at the heart of the first chapter, On Revelation Itself, and it has come to us in the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass, in the section we'll use as our Closing Prayer today. It echoes the beginning of the Letter to the Hebrews, which is a message of hope for everyone who has ever wondered why God has never given up on us.

The second chapter is about Handing On Divine Revelation; it's important to know that the word "tradition" is an action-word. It literally means "*handing on*"; so it is as much about the act of handing something on to other people (particularly the next generations) as it is about the content of what we hand on. Tradition cannot, by definition, be something fixed, because, as we hand on our faith, the history of doing so develops. With Scripture, believers have naturally been guided by respect and care for original texts. Vatican II came at a time when Catholic Scripture studies had moved on from troubled times at the end of the nineteenth century, when a scientific study of ancient texts was viewed with intense suspicion. Fortunately, writers like Henri de Lubac SJ gave us excellent studies on the history of exegesis (critical explanation or interpretation of Scriptural texts), and at the same time scholars like Martini were able to use the latest tools in linguistics and textual analysis. This meant that Catholic exegetes and translators gave the Church rich insights and high-quality new translations like the Jerusalem Bible. We have a duty to be faithful to original texts, but we also rely on qualified specialists to interpret them in ways we can understand. Chapter 3, Sacred Scripture, its Divine Inspiration and Interpretation, is very clear on this. Biblical scholars are certainly not to be feared, but valued and supported.

I would like to offer you §24 in full: "*Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinising in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word. For the Sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and since they are inspired, really are the word of God; and so the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology. By the same word of Scripture the ministry of the word also, that is, pastoral preaching, catechetics and all Christian instruction, in which the liturgical homily must hold the foremost place, is nourished in a healthy way and flourishes in a holy way*". The message is clear: the Word of God has to be at the heart of every action of the Catholic Church. Cardinal Martini was spot-on when he said that "*Vatican II gave the Bible back to Catholics*".



Questions about the reflection

- In what ways do you think the Bible shapes your Christian life?
- Quite soon our Lectionary will change. The readings at Mass will be from a different translation. What do you know about this change?

Action

- If you read in church, prepare in good time, to help your brothers and sisters to realise that God really speaks to them through the day's readings. If you already do this, quite simply "Thank you!"
- Try to be part of the handing on of Scripture. For some, this may mean using your gifts and offering a course or leading a Bible study group; equally important are the people who take part as learners in those groups. To paraphrase Saint Jerome, if we don't know the Scriptures, we don't really know Christ. Becoming more familiar with God's Word could boost your confidence in handing on your faith, particularly to younger people or recently-baptised adults.
- *"May the voices of the poor be heard throughout this time of preparation for the Jubilee"* (Pope Francis). How does God's Word reach poor people where you live? Do you ever ask them what impact it has on them?



Closing prayer

Father most holy,
You formed man in your own image
and entrusted the whole world to his care,
so that in serving you alone, the Creator,
he might have dominion over all creatures.
And when through disobedience he had lost your friendship,
you did not abandon him to the domain of death.
For you came in mercy to the aid of all,
so that those who seek might find you.
Time and again you offered them covenants
and through the prophets
taught them to look forward to salvation.
And you so loved the world, Father most holy,
that in the fullness of time
you sent your Only Begotten Son to be our Saviour...
To all of us, your children,
grant, O merciful Father,
that we may enter into a heavenly inheritance
with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God,
with blessed Joseph, her Spouse,
and with your Apostles and Saints in your kingdom.
There, with the whole of creation,
freed from the corruption of sin and death,
may we glorify you through Christ our Lord,
through whom you bestow on the world all that is good.
Amen.

from Eucharistic Prayer IV



SESSION FIVE

Faith & Culture

Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)

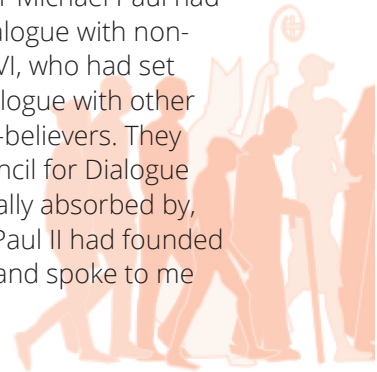
Opening Prayer

Grant that all the faithful of the Church,
looking into the signs of the times by the light of faith,
may constantly devote themselves
to the service of the Gospel.
Keep us attentive to the needs of all
that, sharing their grief and pain,
their joy and hope,
we may faithfully bring them the good news of salvation
and go forward with them
along the way of your Kingdom.
Amen.

from the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs III: Jesus, the Way to the Father

Listen to Experience

In May 1995, I went to a friend's wedding near Rome. An Irish Jesuit, Father Michael Paul Gallagher, had asked me to come and see him in his office at the Pontifical Council for Culture while I was in the city. He had contacted me when he discovered I had been appointed secretary of the Committee for Dialogue with Non-Believers at the Bishops' Conference in London. Like many Bishops' Conferences, ours had committees which 'mirrored' the work of Vatican departments or 'dicasteries'. Like myself, Father Michael Paul had studied atheist philosophy, and was very interested in dialogue with non-believers. That dialogue was inspired by Pope Saint Paul VI, who had set up commissions at the end of Vatican II to embark on dialogue with other Christians, with followers of other religions, and with non-believers. They had all become Pontifical Councils, but the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers had been fused with, and was eventually absorbed by, the Pontifical Council for Culture, which Pope Saint John Paul II had founded in 1982. While I was in his office, various people came in and spoke to me



in different languages and, to be polite, I answered them in their languages. I had no clue what was going on, until some days later, back at home, Archbishop Worlock called me and said, *"I don't know why, but they want you in the Vatican"*. I thanked him for his encouraging words, to no effect. So what had happened the preceding Saturday was an interview!

A whole new phase of my life opened up. Although my specialisation was atheist philosophy, particularly Marxism-Leninism, my working days were spent almost entirely in the realm of the Church's dialogue with culture. People were (foolishly) convinced that, with the fall of the dreaded wall in Berlin, there was no longer any threat from atheism. There were no longer any official dialogues with any atheist groups, so I 'did my own thing' on that score, by contributing to our quarterly magazine *Culture e Fede* (Cultures and Faith) news items on the atheist and humanist organisations whose publications poured on to my desk every month.

But I spent my time in the world of culture, being summoned every time an English or Arabic-speaking culture minister arrived, writing briefs for new Nuncios on the cultural situation and relations with non-believers in the countries to which they had been sent, answering vast quantities of English-language correspondence, writing speeches and articles signed by my nom de plume, Cardinal Paul Poupard, representing the Holy See at meetings of UNESCO and organising international seminars as far away as Nairobi and Beirut. It was fascinating work. It stemmed from Chapter II in Part II of Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), entitled The Proper Development of Culture - §§53-62. In The Address of Pope Paul VI during the Last General Meeting of the Second Vatican Council, the Pope had recognised that some people would be surprised at how much attention the Council had paid to culture; perhaps this short extract will explain some of the reasons: *"Although the Church has contributed much to the development of culture, experience shows that, for circumstantial reasons, it is sometimes difficult to harmonise culture with Christian teaching. These difficulties do not necessarily harm the life of faith, rather they can stimulate the mind to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the faith... May the faithful, therefore, live in close union with the other men of their time and may they strive to understand perfectly their way of thinking and judging, as expressed in their culture"* (§62). The emphasis of *Gaudium et Spes* is on dialogue with the world of science, literature, the arts, universities, the media and the many other institutions which mould people's values and opinions.



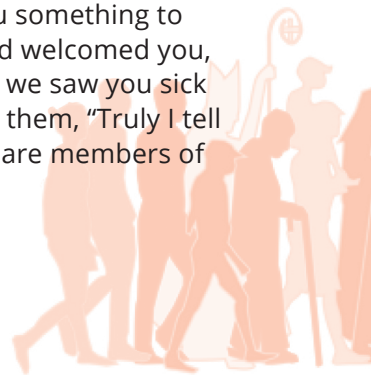
By the way, my quiet acknowledgement of what the world's atheist and humanist organisations were up to did pay off, in an unexpected way. One day, a colleague from Transylvania told me *"two Indian priests"* had come to see me. I went to the waiting-room and discovered they were the leaders of the biggest atheist-humanist organisations in India and Nepal! They wanted to meet *"whoever writes all about us but never judges us"*. I told them that, since our office was in the business of dialogue, it was not my job to wage a war on atheists and humanists. Theirs was the first of several visits from such organisations. And then I was moved!

First questions about today's theme

- What do you think of constant claims like "science disproves religion", which are fed to students in schools and universities, and pour into our living-rooms in documentary programmes? How do you think we should react...?
- What are the most powerful influences in today's culture (on the Church, on your family, on your children, on yourself)?
- What do you know of engagement by the Church in our country with cultural institutions?

Scripture

Matthew 25,34-40: "Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."



Genesis 18,23-26: "Then Abraham came near and said, 'Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?' And the Lord said, 'If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.'"

Acts 17,22-25,27-28: "Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things..... so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring."

Reflection

Here is a statement about the state of the world today (written in 2014). It is meant to spark off your thoughts and reactions. It is written by a Catholic who is clearly concerned about the state of things, one who would love to see the Church succeed in her mission. What do you think?

"In the summer of 2014, the Synod of Bishops published a working document — titled, *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelisation* — in preparation for an Extraordinary General Assembly of bishops planned for that autumn. That assembly's task was, in part, to examine this question: Why do Catholics routinely ignore Church teaching on marriage, sexuality and family life? In the section of the working document that summarised responses to a Vatican questionnaire on this question, the following were proffered by episcopal conferences around the world as answers: *"pervasive and invasive new technologies; the influence of the mass media; the hedonistic culture; relativism; materialism; individualism; the growing secularism; the prevalence of ideas that lead to an excessive, selfish liberalisation of morals; the fragility of interpersonal relationships; a culture*



which rejects making permanent choices, because it is conditioned by uncertainty and transiency, a veritable 'liquid society' and one with a throw-away mentality and one seeking 'immediate gratification'; and, finally, values reinforced by the so-called culture of waste and a culture of the moment...."

"I'm not aware of a better list of the existential waste products generated by the Empire of Man. To it we might add the worship of the state, on the left, and the nation, on the right. The Goddess of Liberty, the 'New Colossus', lifts her lamp beside the golden door, but in its reflected glow we see a darkness descending that was hinted at by the poet Leonard Cohen:

Things are going to slide, slide in all directions
Won't be nothing you can measure anymore.
The blizzard of the world has crossed the threshold
And has overturned the order of the soul.
When they said REPENT REPENT
I wonder what they meant...
I've seen the future, baby:
It is murder"⁹.

I am guessing that some of you will agree with Mark Gordon's assessment of the modern world. Some of you may think he exaggerates, and others may think he doesn't go far enough in his criticism of what he calls the Empire of Man. He is one of thousands of commentators on the current situation of the Catholic Church, in what have become known as Culture Wars. These wars are waged largely in cyber-space, on social (really often quite anti-social) media. I am glad to see my own dismay at the tone of so many of the exchanges on social media was shared by Nicholas Lash, a man whose patient analysis of things I have come to respect:

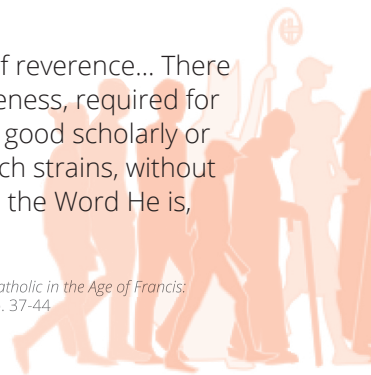
"Increasingly, in place of serious conversation, cacophony takes the form of an unholy and dangerous combination of... strident and destructive monologues - the political, scientific and religious fundamentalisms that boom at us from every side - and... what Steiner calls 'kitsch ideologies'¹⁰.

Good learning calls... for courtesy, respect, a kind of reverence... There are... affinities... between the courtesy, the attentiveness, required for friendship; the disinterestedness without which no good scholarly or scientific work is done; and the contemplativity which strains, without credulity, to listen for the voice of God: who speaks the Word He is, but does not shout¹¹.

9. Mark Gordon, "Babylon's Falling: Recovering an Exilic Consciousness", in *Radically Catholic in the Age of Francis: An Anthology of Visions for the Future*, Washington DC (Solidarity Hall Press) 2015, pp. 37-44

10. Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence*, London (Routledge) 2016, p. 60

11. *ibid.*, p. 62f.



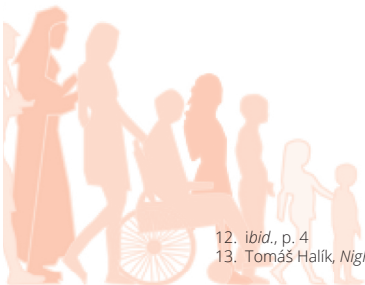
It is not easy to think Christian thoughts in a culture whose imagination, whose ways of 'seeing' the world and everything there is to see, are increasingly unschooled by Christianity and, to a considerable and deepening extent, quite hostile to it"¹².

You will probably all have (fairly strong) opinions on the good and bad points to be made about social media, and I hope you all have opinions on the relationship between the Church and contemporary culture. It seems important to make up your mind about whether you think the Church should a) fight against culture and be very critical of many things, or b) behave more like the mother she is, loving her children enough to see through their tantrums. If you are interested to know more about what the Pontifical Council for Culture did before it was swallowed up into the new Dicastery for Culture and Education in September 2022, this document will be useful: <http://www.cultura.va/content/cultura/en/pub/documenti/pastoralecultura.html>

I realise some people will be very disappointed that I have not mentioned the other chapters of *Gaudium et Spes*, but I did say early on that I would give you a taste of the four Constitutions, and point you in the right direction to find the parts I could not cover. Part I is about the human person, the human community, man's activity throughout the world and the role of the Church in the modern world. This is what Pope Saint Paul VI stressed in his address at the end of Vatican II.

Chapter I (§§47-52) in Part II of *Gaudium et Spes* is on Fostering the Nobility of Marriage and the Family, Chapter III (§§63-72) is on Economic and Social Life, Chapter IV (§§73-76) is on The Life of the Political Community and Chapter V (§§77-92) is on The Fostering of Peace and the Promotion of a Community of Nations, with very important sections on The Avoidance of War and Setting up an International Community. This rich addition to the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church could possibly be described as a welcome response to these wise words of Tomáš Halík:

"If our world is to be healed we can no longer rely on the logic of *"as you have done to me so I'll do to you"*. We must learn the logic of *"as God has done to me, so I'll do to you"* - the path of forgiveness and reconciliation"¹³.



12. *ibid.*, p. 4

13. Tomáš Halík, *Night of the Confessor*, New York (Image Books) 2012, p. 181

Questions about the reflection

- Is the world in a mess? Can you explain your answer?
- Is the Church in a mess? Can you explain your answer?
- The first words of *Gaudium et Spes* are: *“The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ”*. In your experience, is this the way things are or is it a work in progress? Please explain.

Action

- Look at the structure of *Gaudium et Spes*. It is an amazing document, and I hope you will be inspired to read at least part of it.
- Find ways to check if our Church (perhaps especially the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales) makes a difference to British culture. This is not a criticism, but a 'health check'.
- *“May the voices of the poor be heard throughout this time of preparation for the Jubilee”* (Pope Francis). Try to identify some of the many forms of poverty in Britain today.



Closing Prayer

I thought it would help to finish where we started, with what became known last year as The Synod Prayer, the Adsumus prayer from Vatican II:

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name,
with You alone to guide us.
Make Yourself at home in our hearts.

Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.

All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever.

Amen.



TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT...

The Four Constitutions:

https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm

Jubilee Year 2025:

<https://www.iubilaeum2025.va/en.html>

The Synodal Pathway:

<https://www.synod.va/en.html>







The logo shows four stylized figures, representing all of humanity, coming from the four corners of the earth. They embrace each other to indicate the solidarity and fraternity which should unite all peoples. The figure at the front is holding onto the cross. It is not only the sign of the faith which this lead figure embraces, but also of hope, which can never be abandoned, because we are always in need of hope, especially in our moments of greatest need. There are the rough waves under the figures, symbolising the fact that life's pilgrimage does not always go smoothly in calm waters. Often the circumstances of daily life and events in the wider world require a greater call to hope. That's why we should pay special attention to the lower part of the cross which has been elongated and turned into the shape of an anchor which is let down into the waves. The anchor is well known as a symbol of hope. In maritime jargon the 'anchor of hope' refers to the reserve anchor used by vessels involved in emergency manoeuvres to stabilise the ship during storms. It is worth noting that the image illustrates the pilgrim's journey not as an individual undertaking, but rather as something communal, marked by an increasing dynamism leading one ever closer to the cross. The cross in the logo is by no means static, but it is also dynamic. It bends down towards humanity, not leaving human beings alone, but stretching out to them to offer the certainty of its presence and the security of hope. At the bottom of the logo is the motto of the 2025 Jubilee Year: *Peregrinantes in Spem* (Pilgrims of Hope), represented in green letters.



Diocese of Westminster
AGENCY FOR EVANGELISATION

