

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

EXPLORING THE FAITH



**7.15pm - 9pm, Wednesday, Our Lady of Dolours Parish,
Chatswood commencing Wednesday, 7th August, 2024
(St Peter's meeting room) Led by Anthony Seeto**

SO, WHAT IS THIS COURSE?

The content of this course was developed by the late Fr John Elliot in the UK who arrived to my then parish, St Edmunds, Millwall, London in 2011. I was captivated by the wonderful insights on the Faith he shared during my time as a catechist, and I am prompted to pass on these insights within the Good News here in my parish of Our Lady of Dolours, Chatswood.

This course was originally designed for those who are thinking about becoming members of the Catholic Church. You do not have to have made up your mind as yet, perhaps you are curious and want to know more before deciding to become Catholic. Perhaps you may be interested to know more about the Catholic faith because you are married to one and want to know what your partner believes. Or perhaps you are a member of another Christian Church, but are ecumenically minded, and want to know what are the similarities and differences in what we believe.

Over the years, however, we've found this course to be also very helpful to Catholics who have felt their faith has become stale and need to be updated (it can happen to us all). Many of us learnt about the Faith during our school years, and have now found that learning has left gaps that now need to be filled. Hence recently over half of participants are now Catholics.

Please note, the course does depend, to some extent, on a rapport building between the participants – so that, for example, each feels comfortable to ask about things that are not clear. This is not a generalised course of lectures in which individuals choose sessions that interests them. There must be a degree of commitment to the course as the insights require an understanding of earlier insights.

Participants who are not Catholic already, who do complete the whole course, and who wish to do so, will be received into full communion with Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil Mass, receiving, as appropriate, the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

The course is in four sections: the first three are designed progressively to bring people to their Reception; the fourth section, after Easter, is designed to smooth their introduction to life as a member of this Catholic parish.

I hope you will come, see and join the course and find it an inspiring and joyous experience.

Anthony Seeto

THE PRE-CATECHUMENATE

Getting Started

Everyone who gets to the point of considering membership of the Catholic Church has already had some experiences of God. In this section of the course we want to help people recognise these experiences for what they are and to realise that millions of others over many centuries have had similar experiences. It is out of those millions of experiences that the Christian understanding of God and of our relationship with Him has emerged.

7th August ***Our Own Faith Histories*** – In a relaxed atmosphere, we chat about what backgrounds have we come from. Many people have wondered about God through the ages. Most people have, or have had, doubts about the existence of God, about ‘organised’ religion, about the difference between truth and superstition. We look at our thoughts, experiences and expectations, and what is it that brings us to this meeting tonight?

14th August ***Drawing the Face of God*** – Much of our relationship with God is influenced by how we see Him. We are asked share our ideas of God. We will explore God the Father, friend, shepherd, creator, consoler, teacher, king, omnipresent ruler.... etc How does that relate to the experience of the Jewish people from Abraham to Christ.

Introduction to the Old Testament

These faith histories, these ideas of God, come out of our common condition as human beings. We all of us are, as it were, genetically programmed to be able to encounter God and to recognise our need of Him. That is why there are religions in every country and culture and in every period of history.

Almost 4,000 years ago, those encounters in a small patch of land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean began to take on a particular form. Often people were puzzled, often frightened, about their encounters with God, but, when they shared their experiences with each other, they found a common understanding slowly emerging.

The Old Testament is the story of that growing understanding. It is a story of God, but it is also a story of people getting it wrong as well as getting it right, it is a story of deeply flawed people who, under God's light, begin to make some sense of the appalling chaos of their lives. It is a story of people just like us, of people whom we can instantly recognise from our own day. We look at six examples:

21st August ***Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22:1-14)*** Abraham and his wife Sarah, in their old age, finally had a son and called him Isaac. Imagine how they loved that child! One day, Abraham hears God tell him to kill his beloved son in sacrifice to God.

28th August ***Joseph & the Coat of Many Colours (Genesis 37:1-36)***. Joseph is the very talented son of Jacob, son of Isaac. He has a chequered history before, finally, rising to greatness.

4st September ***Moses I (Exodus 1:1 – 4:31)***. Moses lives some 400 years after the greatness of his ancestor, Joseph. The Jewish people living in Egypt have sunk into slavery. Moses, however, is adopted by a daughter of Pharaoh and lives a privileged life until, after committing murder, he has to flee. Despite his disgrace, he is chosen by God to return from exile and lead the Jews out of slavery into the Promised Land.

11th September ***Moses II (Exodus 5:1 – 14:31)***. Moses faces many challenges before succeeding in his mission to free his people.

18th September ***King Saul (First Book of Samuel)***. The Jews demand a secular king despite living under God's personal protection. Saul's failure to follow God's commandments, leads to God rejecting him. David is chosen by God to replace Saul. In this apparently classic 'hero v villain' story, we nevertheless start to see the deficiencies in David's character.

25th September ***King David (Second Book of Samuel)***. When David becomes king, those flaws in his character become more evident. It gives rise to a serious issue: why is Saul irretrievably rejected by God while David always retains God's favour?

16th October ***God's Ways are not Man's Ways.*** After this brief canter through the stories of the Old Testament, what is it that we have learned? Together, the Old Testament covers some 1,700 years of Jewish experience of God. It is not just a personal experience, but God revealing Himself to the whole world via His involvement in Jewish history. What has been revealed? What significance does it have for us?

THE CATECHUMENATE

We have now set the scene and the time has come to lay out the main elements of Catholic teaching and belief.

The Jesus Story

23th October ***The Birth of Jesus*** – A series of extraordinary events that took place two thousand years ago: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Birth in Bethlehem, the Adoration of the Shepherds, the exultation of the Heavenly Host, the Massacre of the Innocents, the Presentation in the Temple, the coming of the Magi (not to Bethlehem, but to Nazareth), the Flight into Egypt.

30th October ***Proclaiming the Good News*** – we all know he came to proclaim the Good News, but what is it exactly? Why was it so important that it was worth dying for on the cross? What does it mean for us today?

6th November ***His public ministry*** – How and why it changed over time; the role of miracles; Jesus' developing understanding of humanity's difficulty in hearing the Good News; Jesus' own need to grow and change (that arises from him being fully human, but how does that relate to him being also fully divine?).

13th November ***Crucifixion, Resurrection & Ascension*** – Jesus' only 'crime' was his refusal to deviate in the slightest degree from doing the will of God – and they killed him for it! On the third day, he rose from the dead and, forty days later, he ascended into heaven. These events are unique in human history and many, in every age – including his own – have always found it impossible to believe. Yet it happened. St Paul tells us that this is the critically important fact that underpins the Christian Faith: *If it did not happen, then we would be the most unfortunate of people.*

The Holy Spirit

20th November The Role of the Holy Spirit after Jesus ascends into Heaven

– After the Ascension, we have to get on with our vocation; we find it very difficult. Jesus understands this and sends us the Holy Spirit to assist us. The apostles are transformed by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and commence their mission to “go out and baptise the whole world”.

The change we see in them was brought about by the action of the Holy Spirit, which continues to work in and through us to enable us to discharge our vocations and hence play our part in God’s plan of salvation for mankind. Two of the ways in which the Spirit works in us is through His fruits and charisms.

27th November The Sacraments

– The Spirit works also through the sacraments. These provide us with the guarantee of God’s help in different situations or when faced with different problems in life. There are seven of them: Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination, Marriage, Confession, Anointing the Sick, and the Eucharist.

5th February The Saints

– We are called Christians because we commit ourselves to model our lives on Christ. We have the record of how He lived and what He taught in Holy Scripture, so we know what we have to live up to; we have the help of the Holy Spirit through His fruits, charisms and sacraments to enable us to put into practice what we know we should be doing.

The Saints are ordinary Christians who have responded to Christ’s call in extraordinary ways. The first and greatest of them is Mary, the mother of Jesus. They are inspirational for us: perhaps because we see them labouring under character defects similar to our own, perhaps because they faced challenges in their lives similar to our own, perhaps because of the beauty of their teachings, perhaps just because we find ourselves liking them.

Growing in Holiness

We are called to perfection. Jesus Christ gives us the example of what perfection is. The Holy Spirit works with us to empower us in the process of growth and change. The remaining element is us: we have to want to change.

12th February The Nature of Sin

– The biggest single problem we have today is that we have lost our sense of sin. This is largely due to a false

identification of sin with a list of ‘bad things we do’; that is what the secular world means by sin and it was what was meant through most of the Old Testament. The radical change that Jesus made was to shift the target from avoiding wickedness to becoming “perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”. With that change comes a shift from feeling guilt about sin to encouragement to overcome challenges still to be yet tackled.

19th February ***Christian Morality of Life*** – Life is sacred; so long as life continues, the person has the opportunity to repent of his sin, to turn back to God. This understanding underpins the Church’s teaching on abortion, euthanasia, bio-ethics in general and Jubilee (universal pardon).

26th February ***Christian Morality of Sexuality*** – Church teaching is too often presented as a prurient obsession with ‘who does what, with what and to whom’; its truth and beauty can only be seen when rooted in the universal commandment to love, in the role that love should play in our growing closer to God. The sexual sins are those which in one way or another obstruct our growth in love.

12th March ***Christian Morality of Community*** – Human beings are creatures made for love; it is through the practice of love of God and neighbour we grow closer to both. You cannot love in a vacuum. It follows that human beings are intrinsically communal in nature.

THE PERIOD OF PURIFICATION & ENLIGHTENMENT

Teach us to Pray

Prayer is the name that is given to our living, loving, inter-active relationship with God. All that we think, say and do must be rooted in that relationship, must be rooted in prayer.

19th March ***Introduction to Prayer*** Why Do We Need Prayer? – So far, we have primarily been looking at things we come to understand by argument, revelation and reason. However, when we got to the section on ‘Growing in Holiness’, we suddenly were confronted by the expectation that our behaviour

should change – should change because of our understanding of what God is saying to us.

And we found that very challenging! He is God, He knows better than we do what is good for us. But, for us to accept that, we have to trust Him – and that means we have to come to a personal knowledge of Him – we have to learn to love Him and to recognise His love for us.

This development of a personal relationship of love does not, cannot, happen by accident; it has to be nurtured – and that nurturing process is called prayer.

What is the purpose of prayer, given that God already knows what we need? How and when we should pray? We need at different times all the different types of prayer: adoration, petition & intercession, contrition, thanksgiving; we need to engage with the concepts of consolation and desolation and the importance of not confusing them with good and bad prayer; does God answer prayer?

26th March ***Silent Prayer and Prayer Groups*** – Silent prayer includes Contemplation & Meditation, including the practice of Lectio Divina and the various prayer exercises of St Ignatius Loyola. Prayer Groups can be guided by one or more passages of scripture, each individual in the group praises God and seeks His help through prayers of intercession (asking help for others) and petition (asking help for oneself). We also pray the psalms together – prayers from those who, while living thousands of years ago, shared the same experiences that we have today.

2th April ***Traditional Devotional Practices*** – These are the prayers we learn as children and which remain precious to us throughout our lives. Some people are helped in their prayers by using books of prayers on different topics, where the writers put into words the feelings they have but cannot express for themselves.

Some of the problems we face in life are eternal, never changed by growth in technology or differences in culture. For example, in every generation we have to face the desolation of the death of a loved one. Because these issues are eternal, traditions of prayer have grown up to provide comfort to those who suffer.

Sometimes these traditional prayers and books of prayers overlap with more complex devotions such as the Rosary or Stations of the Cross, where a mantra-like repetition of simple prayers provides the space and stillness for meditation on the mysteries of the Faith.

9th April **Prayer and Suffering** – With a loving and merciful God, why is there suffering? And what is the role of prayer when suffering. We look to Jesus for answers.

30th April **Praying the Sacrament** – Guidance on how to go about making Confession, followed by an interactive Mass in which each stage of the Mass is explained and set in context.

LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

This section is concerned with integrating new Catholics into the practice of Catholic life. So many newcomers to the Faith think they have reached journey's end when they are baptised/received into the Catholic Church. They could not be more wrong! Not only have they not reached the end of their journey – they have just arrived at the starting tape.

7th May **Overview of the Faith** – For all his ministry, prior to the Crucifixion, Jesus challenges his followers with the details of the Faith. They continuously ask him to declare whether he is the Christ, to explain what exactly he is saying to them, to plead with him to tell them what they are supposed to do. Throughout that time, he refuses to give them a straight answer, teasing them with further paradoxes, pushing them to make leaps of faith.

After the Resurrection, when they have all the pieces in their hands, he explains how it all fits together. That is what we are doing in the period between Easter Sunday and Pentecost.

14th May **The Parish in the Universal Church** – We are most familiar with the Church in the parish we know, but we are all members of the Universal Church, which has some 1,300,000,000 members worldwide. A complex structure of parish, deanery, area, diocese, conference of bishops and the papacy is not so much a conventional hierarchy of power as an inverse hierarchy of service.

21st May **Building the Kingdom of God in our Parish** – Every activity in parish life has two aspects: there are people who need to receive help, and there are people who need to grow by giving help. In this session we introduce people to all the various groups in the parish, guide them on how to become involved and discuss areas in which parish ministry should be growing into new areas.

28th May ***The Ministry of the Wider Church*** – The parish is but one unit in a worldwide Church, which must be effective at all levels. A guest speaker will be organised to talk about the churches wider mission, the support needed and how people might become involved.

4th June ***Retreats and Pilgrimages, and Final Party*** – We are called to love God and neighbour as we love ourselves. So far, we have focussed on putting love of neighbour into practice, but that is only part of the story: we are obliged to nurture our individual relationships with God. Much of our prayer and our growth in faith and understanding takes place in a parish context, but there are also resources available in the wider Church that cannot be replicated at parish level.

Catholics take their faith very seriously and Catholics find great joy in their faith; we like to celebrate!

THE PROCESS OF COMING INTO THE CHURCH

In the cases where participants (catechumens) wish to start the journey that brings them into full communion with the Catholic Church, there are formal steps to the process, and they are included here.

TBC November ***The Rite of Acceptance*** – This takes place at the end of the first stage and marks the provisional desire of people to come into full communion with the Church.

TBC February ***Rite of Signing and Sending Forth*** – At the Sunday morning mass, the parish is presented with, affirms, prays and sends forth - those who seek acceptance at the Rite of Election.

9th March ***The Rite of Election*** – People from all over the Diocese, who have decided they want to come into the Church, come together at Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Cathedral, Broken Bay Diocese to be accepted by the Bishop as prepared for entry into the Church.

16th, 23rd March & 6th April ***The First, Second and Third Scrutinies*** – These take place during the 10.30am Sunday Mass. They are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong and good. In the rite of exorcism, the elect are freed from the effects of sin and from the influence of the devil. They receive new strength in the midst of their spiritual journey and they open their

hearts to receive the gifts of the Saviour. During the second and third scrutinies respectively, the catechumens will be presented with the Lord's Prayer and the Creed.

Holy Week

Holy Week is exactly what it sounds like: it is the one week of the year in which we celebrate the most holy mysteries of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection. It begins on **Sunday, 13th April**, with **Palm Sunday or Passion Sunday**, when we recall Jesus' entry into Jerusalem; palms will be blessed at all Masses.

On **Tuesday 15th April** at midday there is the **Chrism Mass** at the Cathedral at which priests renew their vows and the Cardinal will bless the holy oils that will be used in the diocese in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and of Anointing of the Sick.

On **Thursday 17th April** at 7.30pm, we have the **Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper** with the washing of feet during Mass.

Friday 18th April is **Good Friday** and at 3pm we have the Celebration of the Lord's Passion. There is no Mass that day, but we will distribute Holy Communion during the afternoon service.

Saturday 19th April is **Holy Saturday**. The church is stripped of decoration and the tabernacle is wide open so that you can see the Blessed Sacrament is not there. At 7.30pm that evening, after night has fallen, we begin **The Easter Vigil** with the fire of rebirth. This glorious service celebrates the resurrection of Christ. It is the occasion when the candidates are baptised (unless they are already baptised by another Christian Church), confirmed and receive the Eucharist (communion) for the first time.

8th June Pentecost Sunday – This Sunday, along with Christmas and Easter, is one of the three great feasts of the Christian year and marks the Coming of the Holy Spirit, through which *“we are restored to paradise, led back to the Kingdom of heaven and adopted as children, given confidence to call God ‘Father’ and to share in Christ's grace, called children of light and given a share in eternal glory”* (St Basil).

REGISTRATION FORM

At the end of most sessions we send out summaries of what has been covered: we find that this helps participants put the course into perspective. Hence if you would like to participate in the course, please provide the details below to the parish office or directly to Anthony via text – this commits you to nothing! (Anthony's email for this course: exploringthefaith@gmail.com contact number is 0414364522), who will add you to the participants list, and provide confirmation of meeting times/location.

Surname:

Personal names:

.....

Address:

.....

.....Post code:

Email address:

Telephone number:

What is your faith (please circle one)?

Roman Catholic

Other Christian

Other Faith

No faith

If you are Christian, have you been baptised?

Yes/No

(Please fill out and place in the contact boxes in the church, or email details to the email address above)