

The World within me



A Religious Education resource book for the second year of secondary education

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The seed which bears fruit

PREPARE YOURSELF:

Have you ever considered how a tiny seed can grow into a beautiful plant which bears fruit or flowers?

Can our lifestyle resemble that of a seed in anyway?

TICK ✓ THE WORDS YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH:

☐

Plan

☐

Change

☐

Emotions

☐

Process

☐

Childhood

☐

Adolescence

☐

Baptism

☐

Confirmation

It dies to bear fruit

Visiting my grandparents has always given me great joy. I love going round the farm with my Grandfather picking the fruit and placing it in boxes. Today is no exception! When I arrived I found my Grandfather patiently arranging empty pots where he intended to sow herbs and other plants. He insists that fresh herbs make food taste better! I was excited to watch him plant these seeds. First I helped him fill the pots with soil and after we went to the shed where he had numerous packets of different seeds. Granddad patiently explained that he had gathered these seeds earlier in the year, waiting for the right time to plant them. This made

me think.....surely the seeds, after being in the bags, have shriveled and died by now...? How could they grow into tasty herb plants? And even if they were not actually dead, how could such a tiny seed possibly grow into a plant? Seeing the quizzical look on my face prompted my grandfather to sit on a brick wall and explain the whole process the seed went through.

The inside of a seed is similar to a school bag! Just like you find all you need in your bag, in the seed we find all that is needed for it to grow into parsley, celery or any other plant it was destined to become. The outside layers of the seed protect all that is inside, so that when it finds the right conditions, it can grow. When the right time arrives, the outer skin of the seed bursts open, and the roots grow deep into the soil to find water and nutrients. It also sprouts out of the soil and grows day by day towards the sun. Eventually the plant grows leaves and becomes the herb, vegetable or fruit tree it was destined to be.





Delve deeper

"... unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." (Jn 12, 24). With these words Jesus was preparing the disciples for his death. However he also had another message (to bring). If we are to bear "fruit" we need to make sacrifices. If the seed remains a seed it will not give fruit, but it changes – it dies – to give fruit. Similarly we too have to change to become better.

I was amazed at the great potential that lies hidden in a tiny seed! Before continuing his work, my grandfather left me wondering by saying these words to me: "Unless the seed falls in the soil and dies, it will remain a seed without giving any fruit."

I kept on thinking about what my grandfather had just told me and I realized that the tiny seed has its life planned out, something which up until this moment I had never realized. If it were up to me, I would have left the seeds on the shelf in the shed, thus halting any chance of them becoming what they were created for. But now I know that for the parsley, the celery or indeed any other plant to grow, the seed must be buried and die, to eventually be born again. Each and every step in the germination process of every plant is important. All this suddenly reminded me of something similar - the caterpillar, which passes through a very similar process. The butterfly turns itself into a cocoon

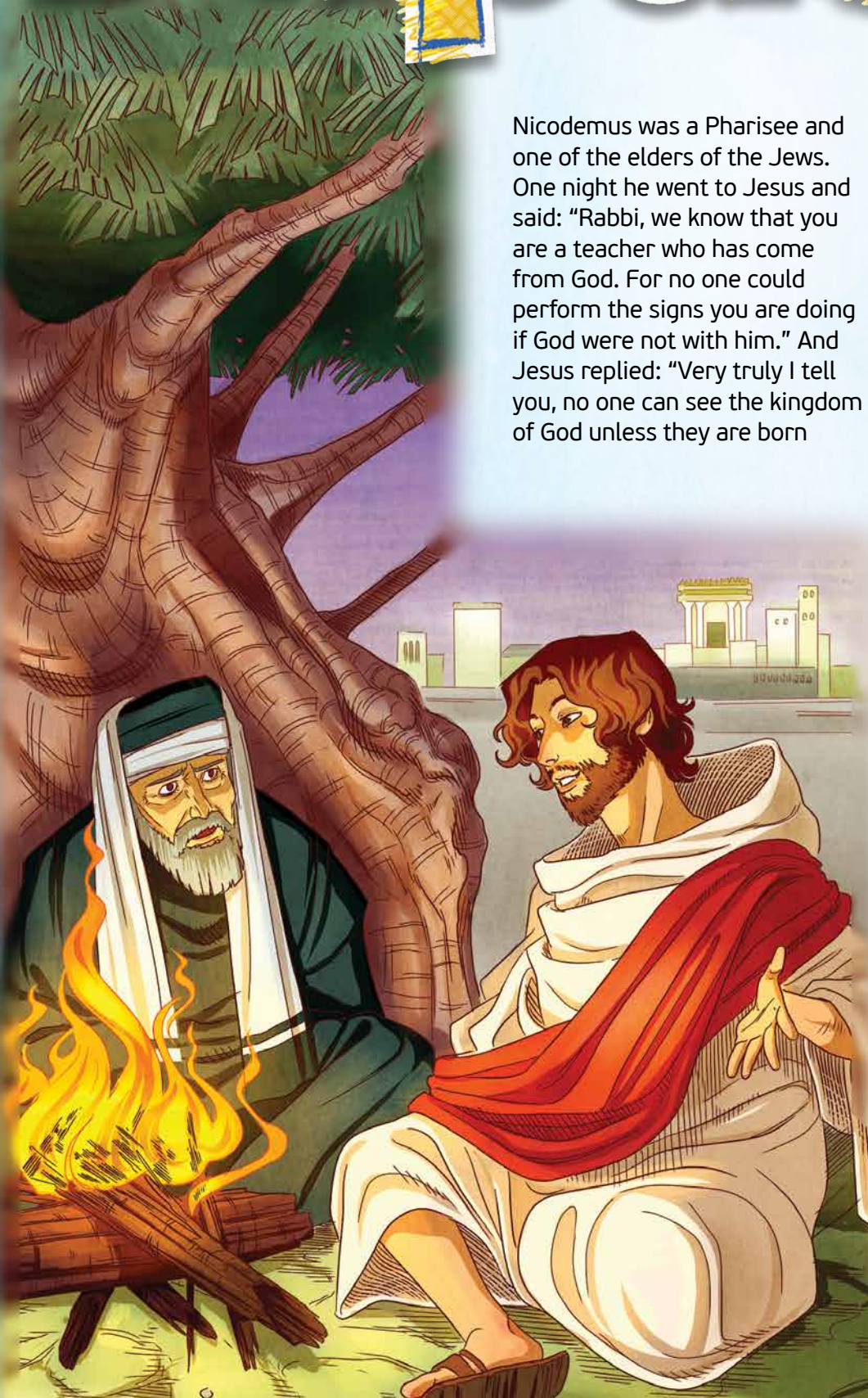
before eventually becoming a butterfly! All created things are so amazing! All creatures and plants grow and develop according to a plan! Each step is an important episode with a special purpose; each step gets them closer to what they are meant to be!

The more I think about the seed and the caterpillar, the more I realize that my life is very similar to theirs. I too grow day by day, developing with each step. My life is like a treasure hunt, and I am compelled to follow clues and search for answers to arrive at the treasure. Of course, the first clue doesn't give me any indication as to what the treasure might eventually be, but it does give me enough motivation to move on. No clues can be skipped, as one leads to the other and they are all important. This is the way my life unfolds, and my life of faith follows a similar path. It is not easy to get to know God, and so we come to know God gradually. God reveals himself to us in many ways, and

this helps us to grow. God is alive and present in the love our parents have had for us from the first day of our lives. He is present in the love our friends have for us, and in the relationships we foster in our lives. Even if a relationship turns sour, God is present in this too. God is also present when I go through my changing moods and emotions. It can be quite difficult to see God when things in our lives go wrong, when a person we love becomes ill, or when a relative or friend dies. But our faith matures even through these events, and it grows slowly and silently in the same way the seed beneath the soil pushes through to finally feel the sun on its branches.

I pray that God gives me the strength and the courage to keep on searching for Him. I should not let anger, fear, sadness or worries stop me from searching for God. These different emotions are important steps that I need to go through. They too help me to eventually get to know God and the immense love He has for me.

Baptism



Nicodemus was a Pharisee and one of the elders of the Jews. One night he went to Jesus and said: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." And Jesus replied: "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born

again." Nicodemus could not understand this and asked: "How can someone be born when they are old? Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered: "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit."

When the seed is planted it initiates the process of a new life. This is similar to what happens during baptism ... we start the process of living a new life, just like the seed which turns into a plant and the caterpillar which changes into a butterfly. Baptism gives us a new beginning and we call this a life of grace. It is this which will help us to grow and to mature in our faith.

Baptism is the first sacrament that we receive and it makes it possible for us to start on our journey of faith. In the Early Church those who were baptised were usually adults, they were called 'catechumens'.



Did you know?

The sacrament of Baptism incorporates a number of symbols which help us to understand this sacrament better.

Water gives life, so this symbol suggests the new life that we are receiving. Water can also be destructive, as in a flood; so it also shows us that it destroys the wrong which is in us and around us.

The white dress signifies purity and it reminds us that in baptism we put on Christ, he who always sought to do his Father's will.

The Paschal Candle symbolises the living Christ, and the light of the candle signifies the faith that we receive through this sacrament.

The oil of the catechumen emphasises strength and healing, whilst the chrism demonstrates the joy and grace we receive as the chosen ones of God.



The baptistery was big enough for an adult to be fully submerged in the water, because baptism was done only by the total immersion of the adult in water. The baptistery had the shape of a tomb, with steps on either side. The catechumen entered from one side and came out of the other after going fully under the water. Just as the seed falls on the ground to die and bear fruit, the person dies to be born of the Holy Spirit. The 'death' of the baptised lets allow him to share in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The catechumen chooses to follow Christ and baptism helps him to live as his disciple. In the same way that the seed dies to give fruit, Jesus died and rose from the dead. We too can go through this experience every time that we, like the fertile soil, bear fruit through our witness of Jesus.

We were baptised when we were still babies. Our parents chose to baptise us early so that the seed of faith is planted in us even at this early age. The sacrament of baptism uses signs and symbols which date back to the Early Church: water, oil of the catechumens, chrism, white garment, paschal candle. In one way or another these all signify that our life can change for the better if we take care of the seed of faith within us.

The challenge is how to cultivate this seed, how we can remain fertile as

the soil is fertile. Baptism initiates this process which will see us grow so that what we received may be transformed into mature faith. The mature Christian is the plant which grew and the fruit he produces is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. According to St Paul the fruits of the Holy Spirit are: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5, 22-24). If we grow in these qualities then the new life that we received through Baptism will become more evident. Although all this seemed impossible for Nicodemus, the Holy Spirit makes it possible.

Confirmation



My grandfather had explained that the seed is like bag; inside it has all the potential of becoming a plant. In baptism the same process started within us. The seed was planted and the process of growth was initiated. Through confirmation, the time is now right for the seed to sprout and grow and be taken care of.

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus promised that he would send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would give special strength, so that the Word may become flesh. Just as the Spirit changed Mary, it could also change the disciples' fear into courage so that they could proclaim Jesus to the whole world. At Pentecost the Apostles received the Holy Spirit, this was the first 'anointing' with the Spirit. The Acts of the Apostles refers to the conversion of the first Christians. They were first they were baptised, then the Apostles laid their hands on them so that they could receive the Holy Spirit. Even today, the successors of the Apostles, the Bishops, lay their hands on those who are going to be confirmed and ask the Holy Spirit to descend upon them. This means, that like the Apostles, I too receive the Holy Spirit in

Confirmation

PRAY

Dear God,
you have poured out
your Spirit upon me.
Help me to accept
your gifts wholeheartedly,
develop them fully
and share them by serving others.
May your Spirit within me
help me become the person
you are calling me to be.
Make me more like Christ every day,
and help me spread Christ's presence
wherever I go. Amen.

(The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth, p 165)



Confirmation. With the help of the Holy Spirit I am able to be a true witness of Christ in the way that I live.

For my Confirmation I am now older than when I had been baptised. I am now growing up and the seed is becoming a plant, it now needs to be strengthened. The farmer takes care of the plant, and he goes through great lengths to shield it from any damage which can not only harm it, but also destroy it. The Sacrament of Confirmation gives me the strength and wisdom to recognise the dangers which may weaken my journey of faith. I will be able to overcome those obstacles which pull me away from God. However I must always be attentive and allow the Holy Spirit to lead me, so that I am not confused and I may continue to grow.

Confirmation strengthens me and helps me to continue being a loyal disciple of Christ. Jesus died on the cross for my salvation. He asks of me the same thing that he has asked of others before me: he invites me to take up my cross and follow him. Confirmation gives the courage to continue following him tirelessly, so that I live my life in union with him. The Holy Spirit confirms in me a willingness to spread the faith. In Confirmation we receive the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts are the special help required by all Christians and disciples of Christ, so that they may be the light, salt and yeast for others.

We clearly remember when the Bishop laid his hands on us and asked the Holy Spirit to descend upon us. He then anointed our foreheads with chrism and said:

“Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.” It was a memorable occasion which reminded us that we are now adult members of the Church and that we now have the responsibility of being witnesses of Christ wherever we may be.

Today the link between confirmation and baptism is much clearer. In baptism I received new life and became a child of God. The seed of faith was planted in me, just like the seeds are put in the soil to start the growth process. This seed starts to sprout in confirmation, it spreads its roots and gradually it becomes a beautiful plant. In baptism I received Christian life. Confirmation strengthens this life, it helps it to mature and to bear fruit. Despite my weaknesses, the Holy Spirit will help me to bear fruit, and this will be manifested in the way I behave.

The tree needs to be pruned

The seed has now grown into a plant. But for this plant to continue growing healthily it needs various things, including water and sunshine. Every so often, the farmer prunes it and clears the soil around it. If needs be, he will give it nutrients. Without this essential care it cannot continue to grow into a strong plant.



Delve deeper

Peer pressure is when others, usually our age, encourage us, and sometimes force us to change our behaviour, attitudes or values. This is a challenge we face. When I am encouraged to skip a lesson or a whole day of school; or to smoke or lie what will I do so that I will not be punished? As I grow older I will have to take more and more difficult decisions. It is not always easy to decide, especially if you are being pressured into how to decide. How do you think you should act in such circumstances?

Did you know?

Pruning strengthens the tree. The farmer does not cut branches in a haphazard way, instead he carefully removes the parts which are dead, sick or broken. Sometimes he also needs to cut off healthy parts which give fruit. Unless he does this, the overgrown part would not allow the rest of the tree enough circulation of air and light. He prunes the tree with great attention so that it may continue to grow into a strong tree.



The same principle applies to us if we want to continue to grow, and mature in our faith. It is not enough to be baptised and confirmed. From time to time we need to be pruned so that we may grow in a healthy way as mature persons. We often ask ourselves what can help us to mature. What is the constant care that I need so that my faith does not die but gives fruit instead? It should not be too difficult to answer! But at times we are not very attentive and we may stop adopting good qualities. Our everyday experiences are important if we give them due consideration. But we may daydream and we might not allow these incidents to help us grow. Not all experiences will automatically help us to grow. In fact it seems that a number of people do not learn, despite the experiences they pass through.

Life provides us with a multitude of experiences. We have good

moments, and others which, if it were our choice, we could very well do without. But each experience, whether positive or negative, can help us to mature and it can empower us to face whatever life may send our way. This is very similar to what the plant passes through, if someone takes good care of it, it will survive anything, even bad weather. This is life. Likewise the sculptor chisels away on a piece of marble envisaging from the beginning the statue he wants at the end. The experiences we pass through are like the chisel blows, be they hard or soft, each is necessary to form the statue.

Baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist are the three sacraments which initiate us to the Christian way of life and a lifelong process of formation. We do not go through this process on our own. We can only truly mature in our faith if we live it with

others. Peer group pressure is not necessarily wrong. Together we can be of great help to one another.

Where do we usually meet our friends? How do we spend time together? What are our favourite pastimes? Are we attentive to the feelings of the others in the group? Do we even notice when others are passing through a bad time? They could be sad or hurt. They could be having difficulties at home. Are we aware of these things, so that we can be of help to one another? Are we ready to help and support each other rather than judge others for their actions? This is true friendship! Such relationships help us grow. Although we all have different characters, our journey of faith joins that of others and together we can discover the beauty of faith in Christ, especially when we are there for each other.

The tree needs light and water



Look it up!

Find out the meaning of the four cardinal virtues. How can these virtues help us to become better persons?

The most essential elements for the plant are water and sunshine. Without these, the plant would be weak and unable to fight the adverse effects of nature. Likewise I need energy to grow up healthily and I also need to discover what represents the water and light in my life so that my seed of faith does not die. Through baptism I have received the possibility to have water and light in abundance: through the Eucharist and the Word of God. Because of confirmation, I have received the power of the Holy Spirit through his gifts. So now that I have reached a stage when I have to face life, I can receive strength from those virtues which will first and foremost make me a person of sound character and also a Christian who is able to live these virtues, especially in my relationship with others.

The care of plants was not the only subject my grandfather spoke about. He also spoke on what it means to be a Christian.

He often reminded me that although the way he was brought up was different from mine, certain issues continue to be important. He frequently spoke about the need of the Eucharist and Scripture reading. Although culture changes, these remain the main sources of spiritual renewal for us Christians. My grandfather amazed me, because when he spoke about God and his life experiences, it was as if they were one and the same thing. His experiences and his faith were interwoven in a way that the latter enabled him to grow and face life in a practical way. With his words and actions he made it clear that his faith was the water that gave him life. The Eucharist and the Word of God were a source of life and spiritual energy in his everyday life. Even today, although old, he still sought and discovered God's love. Like a treasure we seek God's love step by step. The closer

we get, the more it affects the way we think about ourselves our lives and all that happens around us. It was clear to me that my grandfather was living his confirmation, a sacrament he received seventy years ago. Apart from being a man of faith, my grandfather is also very wise in the way he acts towards us and in the way he speaks to us about life's problems. My grandfather is my hero, I wish to be like him when I am his age!

Did you know?

The word 'cardinal' comes from the Latin word which means 'hinge', which allows a door to open and close smoothly. So these attitudes will help us to be open to that which is good. I am a person of virtue not only when I control myself from gulfing down a whole cake! A footballer is good not because he manages to score occasionally, but because he trains regularly and each and every time he plays, he tries to do his best.





They will bear fruit?

I know that I cannot be like my grandfather. To become more like him I need to take care of myself and nurture what I have received. I have a long journey ahead of me, and I will encounter different incidents. Like the seed which will eventually grow, I too have been planted and the process of growth is still in its initial stages. Time needs to pass for me to be able to sprout from the soil; at first

I will be a small plant, but then I will develop into a strong tree which will eventually bears fruit. Before I arrive at this point I would have gone through many different experiences. From childhood I will first arrive at adolescence, and before becoming an adult I will pass through the different stages of youth. Like any other progression, the road may seem long and full of difficult moments. Until the plant

grows into a strong tree, it too experiences strong winds, drought and maybe an insect or two which eats from it or infects it with some disease. I too face similar challenges, and I need to overcome them so that I do not waste that which I received at baptism and confirmation. These challenges are different: they might start off from me, like when I am unhappy for no specific reason, or when I

become frustrated because I am too impatient to wait for that which I need. Sometimes my friends also make me face new challenges, like when we disagree, or when we do not support each other, at times we may even tease each other about our faith. It is important to stand firm in what we believe, even when we are with friends. Otherwise we will be like a weak plant which sways to and fro with every breeze. It stands to reason that our friends will influence our behaviour, but then it depends on our strong character not to allow them to influence us in the wrong way.

Today, more than ever, we are living in a society and culture which greatly effects the way we live. We are surrounded with good and bad examples. We need to be wise and strong to be able to choose right from wrong, and not to allow ourselves be drawn towards that which is of no good to us. It is important to remember that not all those we meet have the same outlook and beliefs like us. Although we should always show respect towards others, we need to learn how to refuse that which is wrong, even if presented in a way which seems to be good. If we wish to bear fruit, this is a great challenge, both personally and for all of us who have been baptised and confirmed.

I need to decide in a mature way. I will shape my future according to the decisions I make when I am growing up. It does not mean that I should lose heart when I make mistakes. It is normal to make mistakes. I can always try to make amends after I have done something wrong. It helps if I get used to finding some quiet moments and away from all the noise, where I can think about what

I am going through and how I am reacting to it. I know this because I experienced it when we had short retreats with our teacher and catechists. During this time I discovered how useful it is to have moments alone to think, pray and reflect. Even at home, I am discovering these valued moments away from the television, computer or iPad. I even look forward to these moments because I can meet the real me.

We judge a tree's worth from its fruit. If it does not make fruit it is obvious that something is wrong. I will bear fruit when I convey the values which I received to others and when I communicate Jesus' message to others.

I should never lose heart, because the farmer, who is God, will never

leave the plant on its own. He is always waiting to water me with his Word. When he sees that that a storm may harm the plant, he binds a stick to it to protect it and so it can grow into a strong tree which gives fruit. How true and wise are the words my grandfather quotes from the gospel: "unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (Jn 12, 24).

If I had not been born again through baptism, and I had not strengthened this new life with the sacrament of confirmation, I would not have been able to appreciate God's great love for me, despite the many challenges I meet and the doubts I pass through.

Pray

Find some quiet time. Read Galatians 5, 22-23 and think about the good qualities mentioned. Is there some quality you wish to have but are finding difficult to live? For the coming week pray to the Holy Spirit to help you make this quality a part of you.





The seeds which bear fruit

REVIEW

A KEY WORDS

Briefly explain the following terms:

- ▶ Baptism
- ▶ Confirmation

B MAIN IDEAS

Write a paragraph about the following:

- ▶ Explain how the sacraments of baptism and confirmation can be of help in our daily life.
- ▶ What are the challenges we face at home, at school, with our friends?
- ▶ Write about how our life resembles that of a seed.
- ▶ Write about someone who faced the challenges of life without losing all that he gained through baptism and confirmation.

C STOP AND THINK

Using what you have learnt in this chapter, answer the following:

- ▶ God helps us to face and overcome the challenges we meet. How does he help us?
- ▶ From what you have learnt and discussed which are the qualities you think that you should have?

D FAMILY DISCUSSION

Discuss the following with members of the family:

- ▶ What does being baptised and confirmed mean?
- ▶ How can we help each other live what these sacraments ask of us?
- ▶ Is there some space in house that can be arranged as a 'prayer corner'?



Delve deeper

PREPARE YOURSELF:

Can faith and reason
go hand in hand?

Can we still use the
psalms to pray?

TICK ✓ THE WORDS YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH:

☐

Psalms

☐

Communication

☐

Values

☐

Community

☐

Celebrations

☐

Religious experience

☐

Religious phenomenon

Stages in life

In the Old Testament there is a group of books called the Wisdom Books, amongst these there is the book of Qoheleth. These are books which do not necessarily speak of God and faith, but rather they consider wisdom based on man's reason. This is because faith and reason go hand in hand alongside in our life journey, which is also a

search for God and his signs. The first chapter of Qoheleth speaks about life's truth and everything we go through.

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time

Did you know?

The Book of Qoheleth speaks of a wise old man who ponders on his experiences and the world around him. Why should wise people suffer like the rest of the world? Why is it that sometimes good people have a life of suffering and bad ones have successful ones? Why doesn't everyone get what he deserves? These questions help Qoheleth to move closer to God, the hope of all those who surrender themselves to him.

to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace." (Qoheleth 1, 1-8)

From this passage it is clear that a person goes through many different stages. Have you gone through any of the stages? God gives us time to grow, to discover, to learn and to face life with all its ups and downs. It is in time that we will learn what love is and why there is hatred. It is through time that we learn to appreciate or otherwise, that which is good, bad, beautiful or ugly. In life we face happiness and sadness, hope and despair. Many times happiness and sadness have a face, because we encounter them in others. As the adage goes: "Life is like a wheel, sometimes you're at the top, sometimes you're at the bottom. The world goes round."

This is in fact the challenge of the person who believes in God: faith in God remains no steadfast, no matter what we are facing. Faith in God allows us to search for God in all circumstances, and this may help us to understand what he is trying to tell us through the experiences we go through. It is not easy to continue believing in troubled and difficult times. It is not easy to praise God when things are not going your way. The letter to the Hebrews puts this in plain words: "And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children: 'My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.' Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what

child is there whom a parent does not discipline? If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children." (Heb 12, 5-8)

Contrary to what many may believe, God is not there to punish, and neither is he indifferent to what happens to us. Many events in our life occur because of the limitations of time. So we get sick, we hurt, we make others suffer, we do not understand and we do not think enough of the long term. God is not a spectator who simply watches and decides not to be involved. If we allow him, God helps us when we are weak and in difficulty. Although his presence does not do away with wrong doings and sufferings, it supports us so that we do not fall victim to these difficulties.



What are the different stages of life? Life is a process, it is ever changing and continuously presents us with new experiences. The problem is that sometimes we are not capable of stopping to think and to express our feelings. If we want to mature holistically we need to be in touch with what we are going through. We are now at a stage when we are no longer children, we are growing up and we are starting to think differently. We might also be going through new emotions. Sometimes we feel on top of the world and in the next instant we feel down and sad for no apparent reason. There is nothing abnormal about this, these mood swings are most probably more evident in adolescent years. It depends on us whether we allow these situations to help us grow and to mature. This could even turn out to be one of the best times for us to deepen our faith.

A religious experience

Today we are living in what is called a pluralistic society. Not everyone has the same beliefs, or the same value structure. Not everyone has the same outlook of life and not everyone gives the same interpretation to man's experiences. There was a time when it was believed that man has an inherent religious character. But today this is challenged. At the same time, in spite of what one may believe, we all have questions about

life and about the existence of all that is around us. Some try to reason out everything; they believe that science can give answers to the how and why of things. In all of this, others perceive the hand of God. Unfortunately there were times when faith and reason were

in dispute, and it was thought that science and faith did not go together.

Today we know that a balance between the two is possible. Science and reason do not eliminate faith. Man must use reason in whatever he does and scientific discoveries celebrate that which increases man's knowledge both of himself and of the world around him. In all of this, faith has a place. Faith is that



aspect which will answer the big questions of life which reason and science are unable to answer satisfactorily. Apart from a brain, man also has a heart. The heart does not only need explanations, it needs understanding. Blaise Pascal, a famous philosopher once said: "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know." Saint Augustine lived in the first centuries of Christianity and he asked many questions and tried to discover the reason for everything. Today he remains famous for his confession: "our heart is restless until it rests in you."

Religious experience is that which pushes man to continue in his search for God discovering that he is truly present despite the numerous discoveries and achievements. Our Christian faith helps us believe that faith in God helps us to look at life in a more holistic way. At one time or another we all find ourselves asking about the aim of life and about everyday realities. Religion tries to address the why questions, while science addresses the how. For example, the world goes around the sun. This is an accepted fact, scientifically proven. Faith and the Bible do not try to explain how this comes to be. Faith and the Bible on the other hand, do help explain, that faced with the enormity of the universe, our life is the consequence of God's love for us. Life is not incidental, it is a gift from God.

Believing in God as creator of all does not mean that we no longer want to extend our knowledge or to stop our search for discovering the beauty around us. Our commitment to widen our knowledge through scientific discoveries does not go against our faith in God. It was God himself who planted this desire for knowledge and discovery, and it is

part of our human nature. This curiosity pushes us to know more but it does not exclude the reality that in our everyday life we have particular moments when we are able to experience God's strength around us.

It is therefore important to know what we mean by experiencing the presence of God. What does one understand when one says that one can feel God's presence in one's life? Have we ever had this type of experience? We need to ask what we understand by religious experience and if we agree that at one time or another, everyone has this type of experience. Even those who do not believe in God, face the same challenging questions about life.

Making space for faith and for religious experience is a good practice because it will bring you closer to God and makes your response in faith possible. Let us imagine a well. No matter how big this well is, and no matter the amount of rain, the well will remain empty unless it is open. The same happens to us, if we do not make space for God in our lives, God will remain at a distance and we may arrive at the wrong conclusion that God has forgotten all about us or even that he does not exist at all.

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Shows you who you are

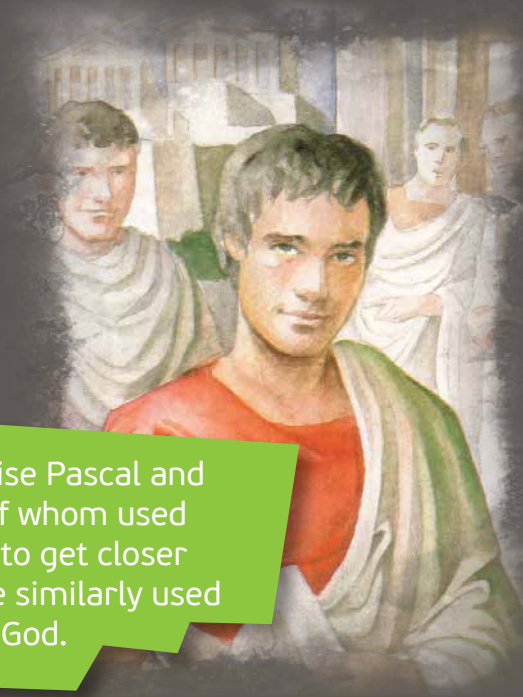
Gives a reason for living

Leads you to a personal relationship with your creator

Makes it possible to know yourself better

Brings you closer to others

We need to make space for God in our lives. A simple way to achieve this would be to stop and think about our day's happenings. We think about the way we are feeling, about how we are reacting to things that are happening to us. We need to make space for God, be it in prayer or reflection time, using the Word of God or some other book. In this quiet time, God reveals to us that which we cannot hear in the clamour we live in. To achieve this we need to be attentive and able to listen well. In fact, St Paul in the letter to the Romans, says that "faith comes from hearing." To listen with your heart will help you to discover things about yourself that you will not be able to find in books or told by others.



Look it up!

Previously we referred to Blaise Pascal and St Augustine of Hippo, both of whom used their intelligence and talents to get closer to God. Find others who have similarly used their talents in their quest of God.

Why?

Have you ever noticed an ant? In summer it continuously searches for morsels of food which it then painstakingly takes to its nest. This process continues to repeat itself, the ant goes out of its nest, finds food and returns to the nest with it. Why does it go through all this? Does it have an eating frenzy? What is the meaning behind all

this? The ant is preparing for the winter months during which it will not be able to leave the nest in search for food. It does this because it values life, if it does not store food, it will die. It is not acting foolishly at all!

We sometimes hear adults speaking about values. What are

these values we hear so much about? Why are they in a crisis? Each object has its own value but then it also has the added value we attach to it. Sometimes we value certain things we should not and ignore others of value. Think about it. What do you do from the moment you wake up until you go back to bed? Why do you do





these things? Why are you living? Some activities are done with enthusiasm, others with less and then there are others activities we do because we know that they need to be done, even if we do not enjoy doing them. I do not enjoy waking up early but if I don't I will be late for school! We cannot always do what we feel like. Doing what we feel like can disrupt the priorities of values. If we only do what we feel like, we might end up doing nothing that should be done or we might do things which are not so important.

I go to school because I believe in the value of education and study. Food has its value because it helps me grow up healthily. The value of cleanliness is personal health and it helps our relationships with

others. I study because it helps in my personal development and it prepares me for my future career and livelihood.

Things have value in my life because they give reason for living, and this is why I do the things I do. Apart from the values needed to live as decent humans, there are also other values necessary for Christian living. For example,

it does not come naturally to forgive. But forgiveness is a Christian value which makes us whole and true disciples of Christ. The same goes for love. It is natural to love those who love you. But Jesus has taken this to another level. He invites us to go beyond what comes naturally. This is where the help of the Spirit gives us strength to achieve all that we are not able to do alone.



Look it up!

Aesop is well known for his fables featuring animals talking and debating like people. Each story teaches a lesson on how we can live in a better way. Look up one of these fables of Aesop and see what you can learn from it.

No man is an island!

"No man is an island" was first used by John Donne, poet, lawyer and cleric in the Church of England. Today this has been accepted as a basic principle as we are very conscious of the fact that we cannot live apart from others. Today even though there may be great distances between one country and another, the world has become one connected network. Technology has given us tools to overcome the distances between one country and another, between one language and another between one culture and another

and even between one religion and another. Differences separating us still exist, and may have increased too. We live in a world where we are increasingly depending on each other.

Today's world and society have become pluralistic realities. Man is man, notwithstanding colour, race, culture and beliefs. When these differences are excluded, it is man who asks, who suffers and who is confused when confronted with suffering. Man is curious and wants to discover the unknown.

Man is sensitive and wants to understand. The human experience is common to all. The challenge in today's pluralistic world, which has decreased in size due to technological communication, is how to seek value in our differences and how to stop them from creating divisions between nations.

On delving deeper into a person's feelings, one finds the common element: humanity, which makes us closer. With this increased knowledge, we realise that the significant questions about life are

Look it up!

The phrase "no man is an island" is the first verse of John Donne's poem written in 1624. Look up this poem and, in your own words, write the message you think the poet wanted to get across.

Delve deeper

A ritual is a set of actions which have a symbolic meaning. Each community has its own particular rituals. Although there are numerous personal rituals, like washing ones teeth before going to bed, rituals are generally performed as a group. One of the most famous sports rituals is the dance performed by the New Zealand Rugby team: the Haka. Other rituals are religious in nature, such as the sign of the cross and the rite of a sacrament.



the same, everywhere. Different cultures and religious traditions have since days of old asked these questions which man has since sought to understand and answer. We can refer to ancient mythology, wherein man's imagination created legends to try to explain and understand. Ancient religions developed traditions of knowledge and shaped many cultures, helping man to understand the religious sentiments he felt when faced with the vastness of nature or the gods he worshipped. There are also religions closer to our culture: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In these religions man believes in a personal God, who created everything and who has, through time, been personally involved in the human experience.

In this way man has never been on his own, neither when he was questioning nor when he was

receiving answers. He did not go through this experience on his own. In searching for answers and trying to understand, he was always part of a whole tradition. We have referred to the human and religious experience. The educational process is, in fact where we receive the tradition that gives us this identity. This whole process helps us to slowly integrate into society, to feel more part of a religion, which is a community sharing common things. From the society we live in, we receive values which unite us. On the other hand society depends on our commitment to valuing our differences and living together in peace.

In Malta, for example, we are currently living a social, cultural and religious reality which has greatly changed over time, and which continues to do so rapidly.

Up till some time ago, we lived in a society which based its values on those which emerged from the Catholic religion. Religion was in fact synonymous with Maltese culture. Today however, this is changing. In Malta we find diverse ideas, cultures and beliefs. This diversity may initially instil fear, because we may think that all our ancestors believed in might change. But this is not necessarily the case. We have to go through a process other countries have already experienced. Although Malta is an island, culturally, socially and religiously, it is not cut off from the continent of which it forms part. Diversity, similar to the colours of the rainbow, should not be feared. Rather, we should learn to celebrate it and learn how to respect those who are different, those who have divergent ideas and beliefs.

Sharing our beliefs



Delve deeper

Eucharist means thanksgiving and refers to the breaking of bread. The fact that there is a breaking means that it is food for many. Through the Eucharist, Jesus invites us to eat with him. During the celebration of the Eucharist, the bread and wine change into the Body and Blood of Christ. This does not end here, because when we share this bread, we too have to change into the Body of Christ. This is a sacrament which bonds us together as one family without difference or distinction.

When we have something precious to us, we would like to show it off and share it with our friends. This would be the case, for example, when we are overjoyed at receiving a gift. Joy and sorrow are usually two things we would like to share. This is the advantage of having friends. Among whom, there is always one or two, with whom we can share our innermost feelings. All of us have personal, intimate feelings which make us who we are.

Faith needs to be understood on this level, and not only as doctrine and catechism, but something more personal. When faith is understood at this level, we manage to understand the importance of our faith and as Christians who are growing up together. We can be of influence to others with regards to what we believe in and how we practice it. However, just as we can influence each other positively, we can also be a negative influence. In our

group of friends we can help each other to be open to this gift from God, which like other gifts, can be accepted or refused.

There are various ways to share what we believe in. For example, we can help someone who is passing through a bad time, not so much by what we say, but mostly by our presence. Our silent presence is one way of sharing our faith. A basic concept of Christian faith is love. As St John states,



God is love. True love helps us take on good attitudes which open us to others. We all need to love and be loved. However someone who does not show love, will find it difficult to recognise the love that he receives. This is the negativity of individualism, which does not allow us to love and does it allow us to receive love from others. When we close others out, we also close God out. But God is love, and he can only reveal himself through love. When we love and are loved, we strengthen our character, we become better persons and this even builds the feeling of community around us. In this way we do not remain distant friends, but ones who can truly celebrate our friendship. The community gives meaning to the faith rituals that we celebrate. In fact Jesus often warned the Pharisees and Scribes of the danger of becoming hypocrites and superficial in their celebrations if there was no true love amongst the community. Our religion aims to open us to others and to God. If it does not achieve this, it is only a ritual, empty of all meaning. Jesus clearly states: "if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there

before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother." Jesus wants us to be sincere and true.

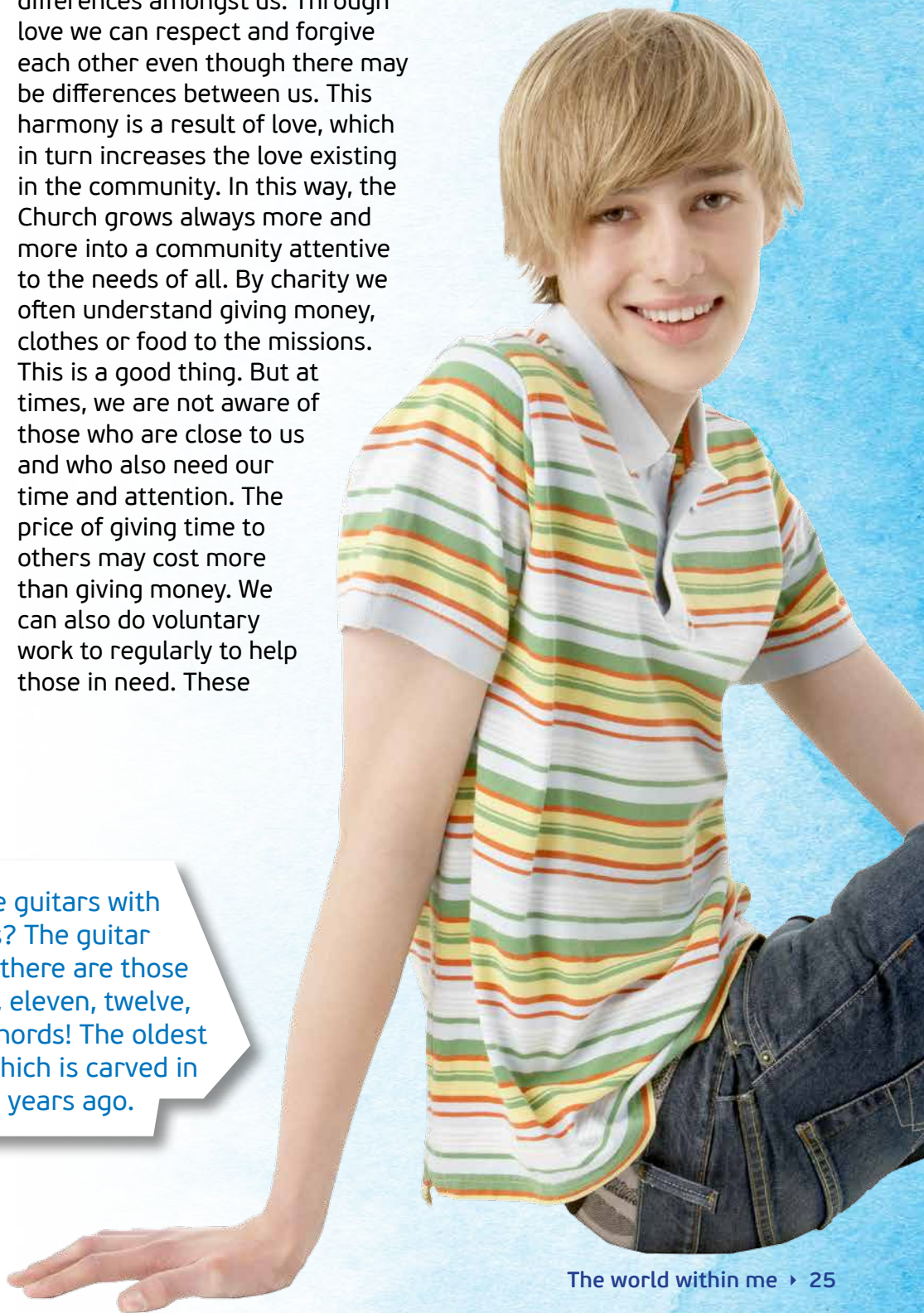
To make this a bit clearer, we can liken our relationship with others to a string instrument. If one of the chords is not in tune, all the melody will be out of tune. On the other hand if all chords are in tune, then the melody will give pleasure to the person is listening to it. We can apply this to the differences amongst us. Through love we can respect and forgive each other even though there may be differences between us. This harmony is a result of love, which in turn increases the love existing in the community. In this way, the Church grows always more and more into a community attentive to the needs of all. By charity we often understand giving money, clothes or food to the missions. This is a good thing. But at times, we are not aware of those who are close to us and who also need our time and attention. The price of giving time to others may cost more than giving money. We can also do voluntary work to regularly to help those in need. These

experiences is can help us discover our talents and grow into mature persons.

"There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." We are not being called to do extraordinary things but to do ordinary things with great love. Jesus reminds us that whatever we do to others, we are doing it to him.

Did you know?

Do you know that there are guitars with different number of chords? The guitar usually has six chords, but there are those with four, seven, eight, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen and even fifteen chords! The oldest picture of a guitar is one which is carved in stone dating back to 3,300 years ago.



Music and Lyrics

We pass on our feelings and beliefs in various ways. Every time we are with others, we share ideas, values, beliefs, sentiments and emotions.

It is not unusual to hear adults comment that the music and songs of their times were indeed more beautiful and made much more sense than today's music. Although we may not agree with this statement, they are not in the wrong, since every generation tends to prefer the music of its time. Some music can undoubtedly bring out strong sentiments and emotions. Music and lyrics have always reflected the culture of the time it was produced and in turn, it moulds the same culture which produced it. Music and lyrics have a mysterious way of conveying sentiments and emotions, often addressing the feelings we go through.

The Wisdom Books include the Book of Psalms. This was the official hymn book of the Jews. Similar to contemporary lyrics, the Psalms described different situations the Jews passed through. Today they help us identify those sentiments and emotions which are universal and still very common in life even today.

AMONGST THE PSALMS WE FIND

Psalms of joy and celebration

Psalms of praise and thanksgiving

Pilgrim psalms

Psalms of lament

Psalms of trust in God

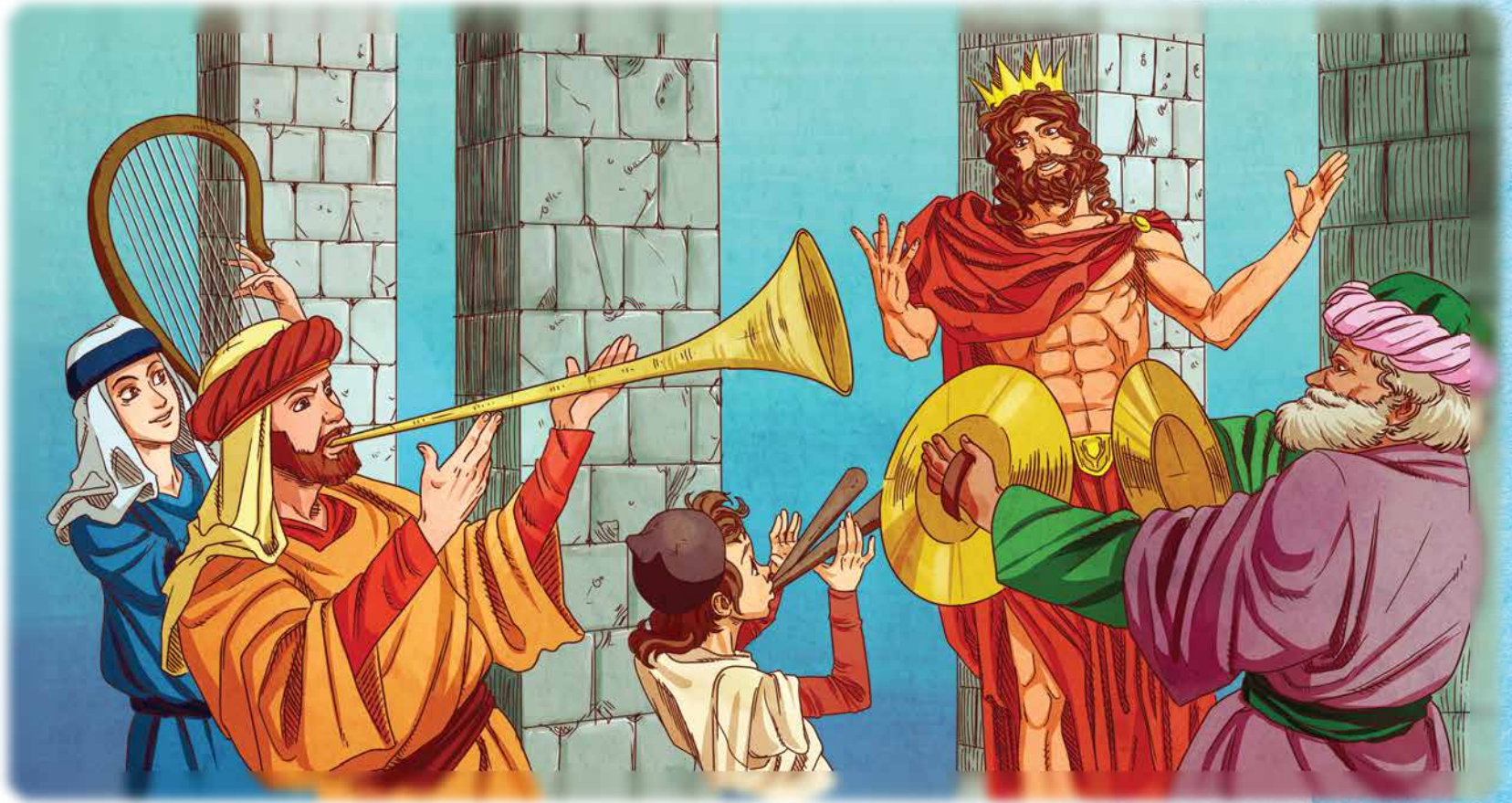
Psalms of hope

Penitential psalms

Work on this!

Find songs from years gone by and from contemporary music and discover the message they want to give, and the effect they may possibly on the listener.





The Psalms are a collection of poems divided into five sections. Although many attribute the Psalms to David, some have been written by different authors.

The Psalms were always sung and they were usually accompanied by various musical instruments. In fact in the Psalms themselves, we often find references to musical instruments, like the harp, flute, oboe, octachord and strings.

Hymns and music are indeed vivid forms of prayer. St Augustine says that 'you sing once and pray twice!' For Christians, Psalms have always been a way to express their faith and their deep religious feeling. The Church treasures the Psalms and uses them in its daily praise to God. The more we become familiar with the Psalms pray with them, the more we become acquainted with the Word of God, allowing the Word of God speak to us and shape our experiences.

The more we discover the Psalms as a form of personal prayer and of prayer in community, the more we can see in them expressions of what happens in the heart of each and every one of us. We also realise that human experience goes beyond time, cultures and religion. The Psalms include all types of emotions, sentiments, and hopes of the Jewish People in their relationship with God and even today they may reflect our own search for God. In the Psalms,

we may find comfort and hope in times of sorrow and defeat. This shows that even today, the Word of God is indeed Good News.

Through the Psalms, God give us hope so that we do not fall victim to what is happening to us, in us and around us.

Pray

Psalm 139 shows God's love for each and every one of us and how much he know us, even before we are born!

"You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise ... Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there ... Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."



REVIEW

A KEY WORDS

Briefly explain the following terms:

- ▶ Different phases in my life
- ▶ Pluralism
- ▶ Religious experience

B MAIN IDEAS

Write a paragraph about the following:

- ▶ Why does God allow us to pass through different experiences, even negative ones?
- ▶ How can science help me to deepen my faith?
- ▶ What is the meaning of values in our life?
- ▶ Why should we stay away from individualism?

C STOP AND THINK

Using what you have learnt in this chapter, answer the following:

- ▶ We may have very well heard of religious experiences of persons like Therese of Avila and Moses. Although we are neither St Therese nor Moses, we can still have religious experiences. Explain how.
- ▶ How can the Psalms help us to move closer to God?

D FAMILY DISCUSSION

Discuss the following with members of the family:

- ▶ How are we helping each other to strengthen our Christian values?
- ▶ How can we, as a family, be of help to others? The family may, for example, visit relatives who live on their own and whom they do not often visit. In the parish, family members can serve as altar boys, choir members, lectors or liturgical animators.

Delve deeper



Along life's journey

PREPARE YOURSELF:

Has man always believed and entrusted himself in a power greater than himself?

Did you know that Abraham is not only important to Christians but also to Muslims and Jews?

TICK ✓ THE WORDS YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH:

☐

Humanity

☐

Monotheism

☐

Sacred Texts

☐

Tradition

☐

Primitive Religions

☐

Wisdom

☐

Christocentric

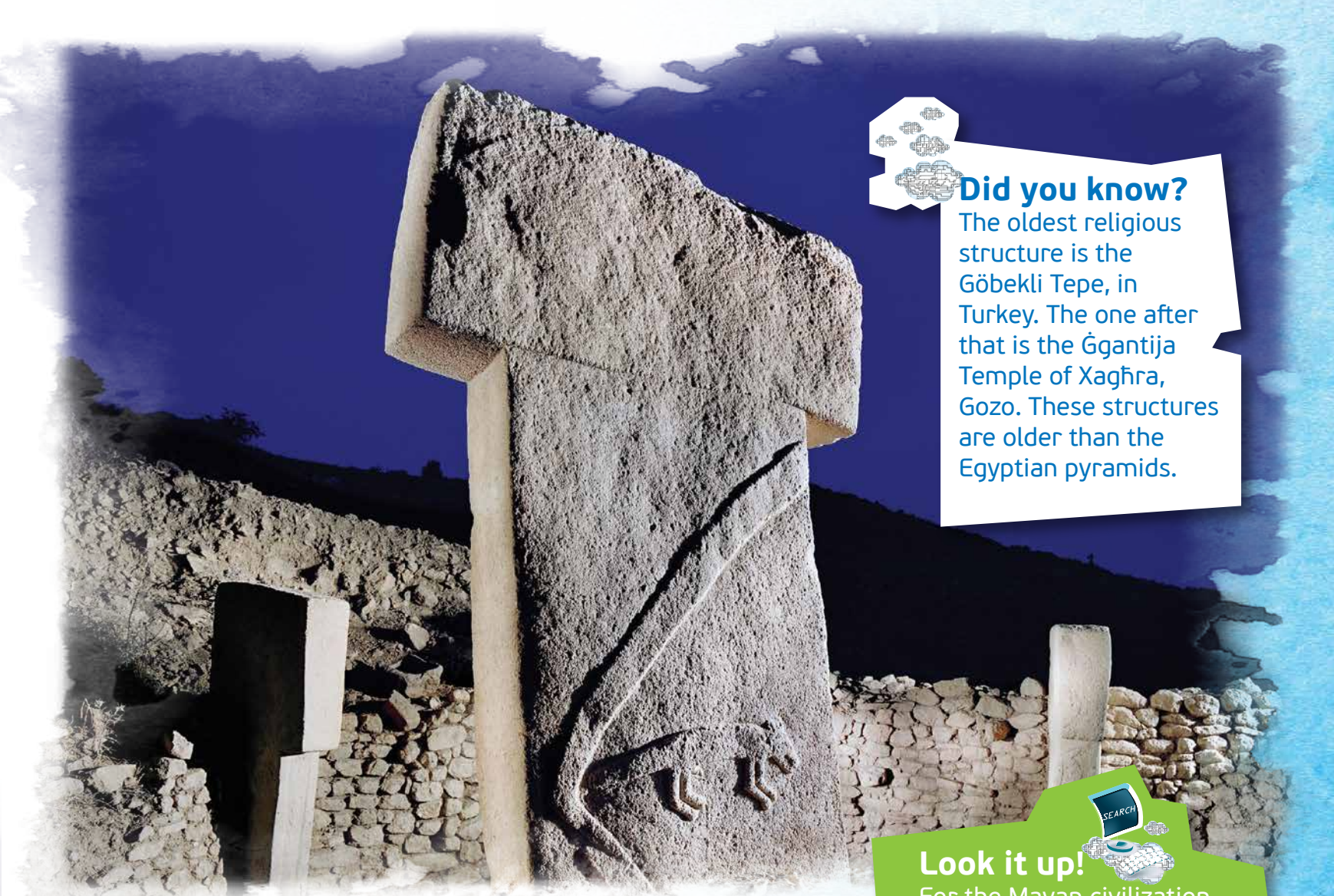
Religion and humanity

Man carries within him a multitude of hopes and questions. From the first days of his existence man has constantly searched outside of himself to answer his innermost questions regarding himself, his creator and the reason for his existence. Archaeology has helped us understand how man lived in

prehistory, what he believed in, how he expressed these beliefs, and his search for that which was beyond him. Primitive religions which take us back thousands of years, are witness to all this.

Why did man engrave, draw or build images which he then worshipped? What is at the bottom of this endless search and sense of awe towards a creator who has brought about the beginning of all that exists? This is what we call man's religious instinct. There were times when man was





Did you know?

The oldest religious structure is the Göbekli Tepe, in Turkey. The one after that is the Ġgantija Temple of Xagħra, Gozo. These structures are older than the Egyptian pyramids.

believed to be 'religious' by nature. Conversely others refute this idea and believe that since religion addresses that which cannot be seen or proven, it must be only fantasy.

On our islands we have temples and sites which today are regarded as a world heritage because of what they stand for. It is evident that they were important places of worship. The statue of the fat lady is an example of this and along with other discoveries which take us back in time, confirm the religious sense of man at that time and which these sites represent.

This religious sense is universal, it goes beyond culture, race and people. Although, the Incas and

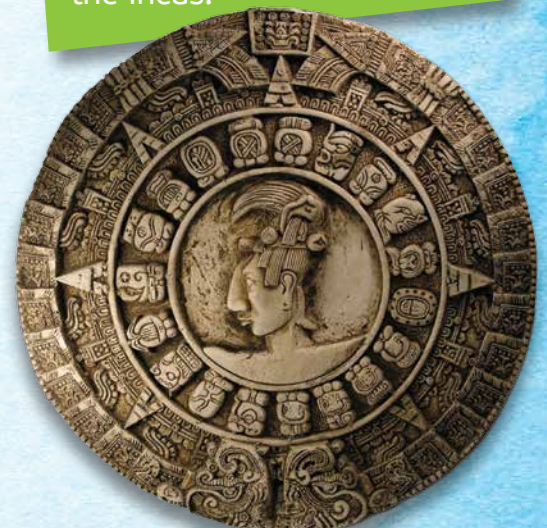
African tribes did not believe in a god as we believe in, they still believed in a power greater than themselves, which controlled things in a way that man never could. Often gods were associated with nature, and therefore any favourable or adverse conditions in nature were interpreted as a sign from the gods.

In South America there are indications showing that a particular tribe, like other tribes elsewhere, adored the sun as their god. There is a religious element in the fact that these tribes had already perceived and considered the struggle between light and darkness as that which can throw light on the daily conflict in the life of human beings.



Look it up!

For the Mayan civilization, religion was a huge part of their daily life. The worship of their gods was closely associated with what happened around them. Look up other facts about the religion of people living in South America in ancient times like the Mayas and the Incas.



Looking back...

Look it up!

Look up Ġorg Pisani's poem, "Il-Ġgantija t'Ġhawdex" and read about the young girl with golden hair who gave up her life to save her country from famine.



From our earliest years we realised that when we did something right we were somehow rewarded while if we did something wrong we were punished. This begins in our relationship with our parents and as we grow up it is strengthened by society. It is based on reason and it is an accepted fact. Therefore it is also something we have come to expect in our relationship with God.

Primitive religious instinct shows that man believed that one had to give something to the gods to be able to receive something in return. If they behaved well, god would reward them, on the other hand if they did not give god what he deserved or wanted, he would get angry and strike back in revenge. This idea is present in Ġorg Pisani's poem, "Il-Ġgantija t'Ġhawdex" which he wrote while reflecting on the prehistoric temple in Xagħra.





Did you know?

The Greeks believed in gods with human characteristics, though they were immortal and had extraordinary powers. These gods lived on Mount Olympus. The Greeks held many celebrations in honour of their gods. For example, it is said that the first Olympic Games of 776 BC were held in honour of Zeus.

Although this poem is a product of fiction, it shows a reality our ancestors lived. A brief look at some other well-studied mythologies will help us to understand better this reality.

The Greeks, the Romans, and others olden time civilisations, did not believe in one god but in many. This is why we call them

polytheists, from the Greek 'poly' meaning 'many' and 'theos' meaning 'god'. These civilisations believed in various gods on whom they called in their hour of need. They gave offerings and sacrificed animals to please their gods and to receive their favour. They prayed to them and held special festivals in their honour.

In these times, the idea of a personal relationship with God did not exist. In fact the gods were seen as those who in some cases could also be vindictive and so everyone sought to please them to earn their compassion.

Children of Abraham

Monotheism is derived from two Greek words: 'monos' which means one and 'theos' which means God. Therefore monotheism means: belief in one God. The three major monotheistic religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

These three religions are closely related and we will be discussing them in the order of how they are found in the story of humanity. All three look upon Abraham as their father and as a central figure from

whom their religion began. We can find this in Genesis 12, verses 1 to 9.

JUDAISM

This is the religion of the Jews, the religion Jesus himself was born into. Christianity stems from this religion.

The first five books of the Old Testament are the most important books for the Jews, and they are referred to as the Torah. The Jews look upon Saturday as a holy day and they observe it by going to the

Synagogue. Their most celebrated feast is Passover (Pesach) when they commemorate their ancestors' escape from Egypt when God delivered them from slavery.

ISLAM

Islam is the Muslim religion which started in the Middle East, after Prophet Mohammed claimed that the Angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him to convey God's message. The holy book of the Muslims is the Qu'ran which was personally written

Live it!

In a number of his concerts, Bono, singer of U2, asks why the sons of Abraham are divided between them. Using the word 'COEXIST' he suggests that we find ways of living together as one family. Let us take this message to heart and through our words and actions, foster unity amongst ourselves.



Did you know?

The Ramadan is celebrated during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Ramadan lasts from 29 to 30 days. It is a time of fasting, since one is allowed to eat and drink only after sunset. Although this may seem difficult, Muslims look upon it as a time to do good things, like spending more time with the family, not lying and helping others!



by Mohammed. The Muslims believe that Jesus is a prophet but not God, whilst they believe Mohammed to be the greatest prophet of all. They pray five times a day, no matter where they are; they regularly give charity, they fast during the Ramadan and they make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. For the Muslims, Friday is their holy day.

Every religion is founded on that which is good. It is wrong to distance ourselves from other beliefs and consider only our religion. All humankind is in search for that which gives sense to life, to its origin and life hereafter. Religion gives answers to these very important questions. In fact the word religion comes from

're-ligare' which means to unite human beings with God.

Even Jesus shows us that we are to interest ourselves in others, as he himself did when some Greeks wanted to speak to him. We can ask about the basic principles of their religion, about their outlook on life, about their celebrations. We should not be troubled if they ask us similar questions! In his first letter St Peter says: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." In this way we make dialogue possible.

We cannot conclude that others are inferior to us because they

have different beliefs. This can lead to fanaticism and religious fundamentalism. The fundamentalist maintains that only what he believes in is true and that the beliefs of others are all wrong. The consequences of such an attitude can result in tragic outcomes, as we sometimes witness on the media.

Look it up!

The Jews celebrate a number of feasts, among these the Passover, Purim and Yom Kippur. Find out about one of the Jewish feasts and the reason for this celebration.



Who do you look up to?

What is a role model?

Do you have a role model in life?

What are his or her qualities?

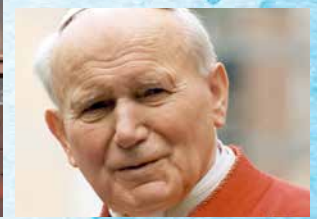
From the moment we are born, right up to the day we die we look around us to see we are going to imitate and how to imitate them. This is not wrong. It only means that we want to have someone to look up to, and to admire, which is quite natural. We can learn from others after they have passed through certain experiences and how they gained wisdom from them. This learning from the experience of others is useful. However we cannot admire everyone! Some people we like, while others put us off! But there is always someone who strikes us in a particular way. At times we do not even realize how deeply these people are actually affecting us. So it is important to know how to choose between good and bad influences. We cannot allow ourselves to be influenced without being able to express a choice.

When we refer to our role models in life, to the people we admire, we are referring mainly to the way they look, or to their outward appearance, although there is nothing wrong in taking care of the way one looks! However it is important that when we admire someone and we allow that person to influence our actions, it is necessary for us to dig deep into



Work on this!

We admire different people for various reasons. Who are those you admire most at the moment and why?



this person's thoughts and heart. The heart makes the man, Pope John Paul II used to say. In all walks of life, we meet persons who have good values which they express through their actions. On the other hand, there are some people who are ready to do anything for fame, even give up all the good values that they believe in! Therefore it is important to evaluate why we admire particular persons. These persons we admire are not necessarily from the world of entertainment, such as actors or singers. There are many people around us who silently and faithfully go about their duties, and they make sacrifices without

blowing trumpets. These are good role models and we cannot overlook them. How can one not admire a father who wakes up early every day to go to work to earn a living for his family, and who also helps in bringing up his children while giving a helping hand in house chores? Similarly the mother who goes to work despite having to take care of her family and of the house is to be admired. There are many people who daily, quietly do great things. These are the people who love others, truly and faithfully. This can also be said of the teachers who are concerned about you personally, more than the grades that you achieve. These

and many others need to earn our admiration. These are the people we should imitate.

Delve deeper

Have you ever heard of Malala Yousufzai? She was born in Pakistan in 1998. She is known for her fight for the rights of young women to receive an education in countries where this is forbidden. This, together with her writings, made her a target for the Taliban who shot at her when she was at school.

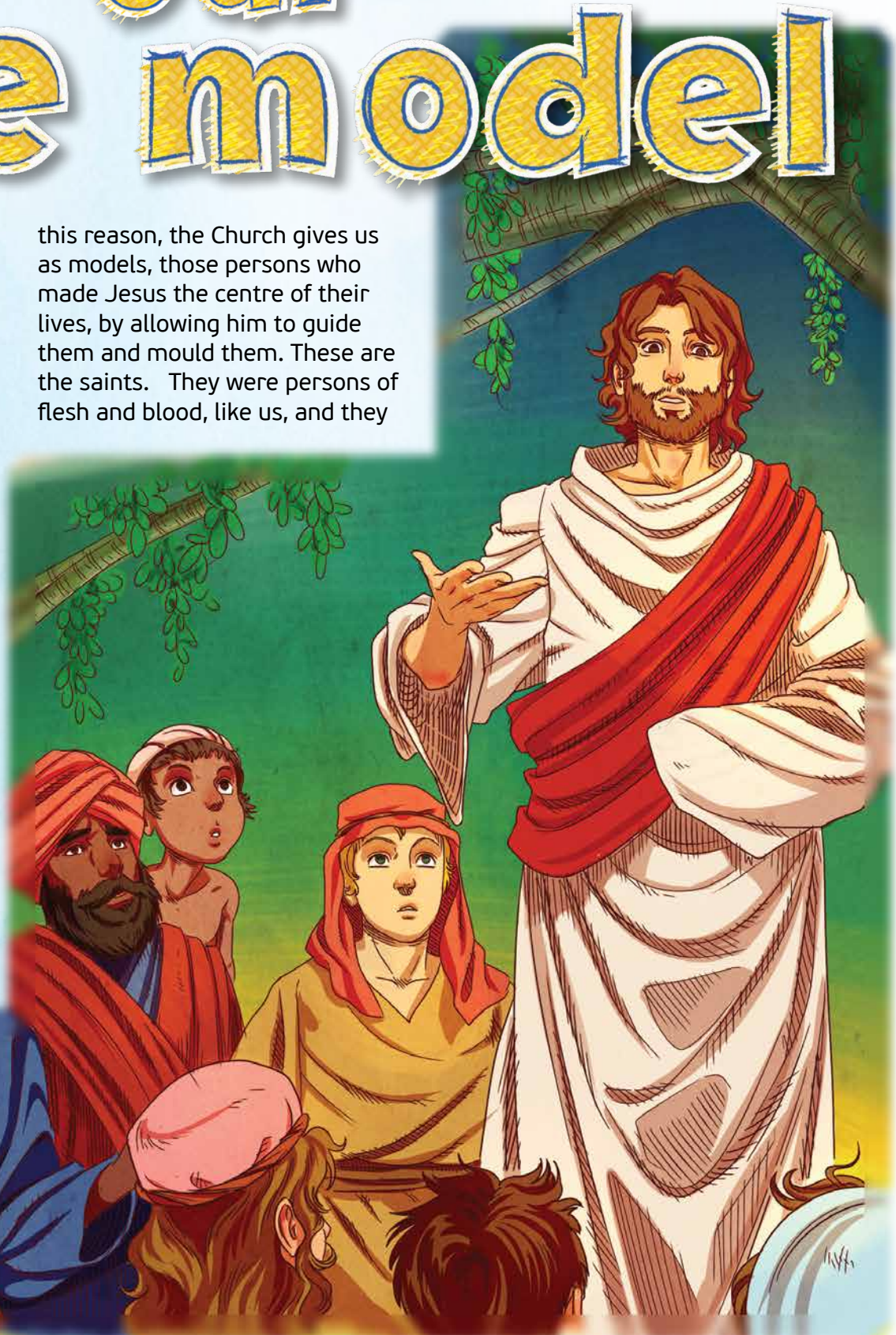


Jesus: our role model

As Christians and disciples of Christ, our faith directs our gaze towards Jesus as the perfect role model for our lives. Jesus is not only someone to admire, but also someone to follow. Jesus offers us a challenge: to find ways of doing things for those we love without thinking of what we can gain for ourselves from such actions. Jesus shows us that one gains only when one freely gives of oneself.

During the Easter vigil, the celebrant blesses the Paschal Candle and says: "Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, all time belongs to him, and all ages; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever." Christ is the centre of everything, and our life can be very different if we allow him to be this centre. For

this reason, the Church gives us as models, those persons who made Jesus the centre of their lives, by allowing him to guide them and mould them. These are the saints. They were persons of flesh and blood, like us, and they





too had faults and sin, doubting like we do. But they chose to keep following Jesus.

The apostles, on the other hand, knew Jesus face to face. They ate, drank, slept and travelled with him for three years. They got to know him really well! The first communities got to know about Jesus through the apostles, and each community thereafter handed on these experiences to the following.

What are the qualities of Jesus through which he wanted to show us God's own heart? How is he different from us?

We can compile a whole list of Jesus' good qualities with which

he showed us God's great love for us. For sure we will not find any trace of egoism. Jesus always sought to help whoever was in need. He lived a simple, peaceful life and he transmitted this peace both in words and also through his actions. He attracted people, because he was special. However, the most original thing that he did is that he paid back the wrong he received with good deeds. He loved those who hurt him. He brought life where there was but death, and it was this very love which brought him to his death and his rising from death for us. This is the foundation of Christianity and the fact that makes it different from other religions.

Live it!

Imagine that you lived in Jesus' time. One day whilst listening to him, he approaches you and says: "Come, follow me." What would you do? Although we live more than two thousand years later, Jesus still calls us today and invites us to follow him and to become like him. How are we accepting this invitation?



The written experience

Each nation has a lifestyle which is generally different from that of others. The way of life of the Chinese is different from that of the American, and these two are different from the way of life of the Maltese. The way of life of a people also makes up its culture. Each culture has evolved over many years to be what it is today, and these traditions are passed on from one generation to another. The word 'Tradition' consists of various things: characteristics, values, beliefs and customs. It is a living reality and each generation tries to keep it this way.

We learn from those before us, who learnt from their predecessors. This tradition includes the way we live as a people, culture, characteristics, values, and also the history which moulded us into a nation.

This is the meaning of 'Tradition'. It is the passing on of information or way of life from one generation to another.

In eras when writing and today's knowledge did not exist, one generation passed its stories, events and proverbs on to the

next generation by word of mouth. The young learnt a lot by heart and this is the way tradition was passed on and kept alive.

Similarly the Bible was also passed on in this way. Before the written word came into being, it was passed on and kept alive from one generation to another through the telling and retelling of the stories and narratives. Before the written tradition, there was the oral tradition, that is, verbal transmission. The written tradition was written many years later, and it took hundreds of years to complete. This was the case both for the Old and New Testament. Before the written word there was the spoken word.

The believing community, which we refer to as the Church, always valued both the Sacred Scriptures,

that is the written Word, and its meaning, which over the years developed into a Tradition, influencing the culture of a whole people. The Sacred Scriptures can remain just text without being understood, if the lives and witness of so many people are left out. On the other hand, the culture of a people on its own, without having any other reference, can easily change with different happenings over time.

St Jerome says that: "ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ." This is the truth. We can get to know Christ from his own words. But this is not the only way. Over time, the communities which believed in him and experienced him left us their witness in the form of writings, as guidelines, these form a living tradition. This witness makes Christ's message

whole, because it gives it shape and strengthens it with the experiences of those who believed in him and lived his message.

Jesus told us that we were freely given, so we must freely give. This gives us much freedom. It shows us the beauty of giving what we have received not because we have to, but because we want to; because we feel that what is good for us should be shared with others. So even today, we feel compelled to pass on to others what was passed on to us. We can only do this in a convincing way if we first make ours all that we have received.

Did you know?

In 1946 some shepherds were walking near the Dead Sea, today known as the West Bank. To pass the time they started to throw stones in an opening along the cliffs and they heard the sound of something breaking. On entering the caves they found several earthenware jars. In seven of them they found some manuscripts. Others were found in caves nearby. In the end, remains from all the Old Testament books were found, except from the book of Esther.



REVIEW

A KEY WORDS

Briefly explain the following terms:

- ▶ Fanaticism
- ▶ Christ is the centre of our lives
- ▶ Tradition

B MAIN IDEAS

Write a paragraph about the following:

- ▶ Show why Abraham is considered to be the father of Christians, Muslims and Jews.
- ▶ Why should we interest ourselves in other religions?
- ▶ Jesus and me ... how can I become more like him?
- ▶ Why is Tradition important?

C STOP AND THINK

Using what you have learnt in this chapter, answer the following:

- ▶ Why does man always put his faith in someone or something which is better than himself?
- ▶ Write about the importance of role models in our lives.

D FAMILY DISCUSSION

Discuss the following with members of the family:

- ▶ Who are the people we admire and why?

Along life's journey



Missteps

PREPARE YOURSELF:

Have you ever considered that the challenges we face can help us mature?

Are we always truly free?

TICK ✓ THE WORDS YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH:

☐

Freedom

☐

Choices

☐

Missteps

☐

Temptations

☐

Character

☐

Journey of faith

Challenging Times

In life it is easy to meet someone who tries to make us stumble and fall and sometimes we too are the cause of others' faltering. It is not the first time that friends are a hindrance rather than a help. It could be that at times, instead of helping others who might need encouragement, we put them down with our words or by simply ignoring their needs.

Life is full of challenges and missteps. The difficulty of the challenge is generally determined by the way we confront it. The outcome depends on how we face the problems that we encounter. If we tackle a difficulty with the right attitude, it can help us mature. On the other hand, if we meet the challenge with the wrong attitude, it can overpower us.

Some compare life to the sea. A Chinese proverb says: The water that a ship sails on is the same water that swallows it up. That is life. The going can be smooth but if we stubbornly fight against the rough seas, it can be heartless. When confronted with life's problems it is important that we remain free, especially from the opinions of others and that we do

not condition ourselves to behave in certain ways. It is good to ask for advice. But in the end we have to be the ones to decide.

Our faith can be a great help in decision taking. At times we forget God or we even turn to him in the wrong manner. Sometimes when hearing people speak about God, we get the impression that God is somewhere high above us and that his pastime is to send obstacles in our way to test us. This is far from the truth. It is important that when we think about life and all it throws at us, and how we face it, we have a clear idea of how God works in our life.

We go through various difficulties and God is always present to assist us in our needs. Since his presence is silent, we have to learn to listen to him and to feel his presence. In the noise surrounding us, or when we are panicking or in trouble, it is usually less probable that we stop to listen to his voice.





Look it up!

Have you ever heard about someone who, like Bear Grylls, was saved by his faith, from the darkness he was in after an accident? Try and find someone else who, through some crisis, found the reason to live in his faith.

A SAVING FAITH

Most probably many have heard about him or seen him on TV. However few may know his story apart from what we see on his survival programmes. Edward Michael Grylls, or else better known as Bear Grylls, was born to a high class family. He had all the opportunity to learn anything he desired. Mountaineering, yachting and shotokan are a few of the pursuits he took up these last few years. After his graduation, he spent three years in the military service with the 21 SAS of the British Air Force.

Up to 1996 his life was one big adventure, until, while on a mission in Zambia, Bear had an accident whilst manoeuvring a parachute. When he was 4,900 metres from the ground, Bear tried to open his parachute, but it developed a tear and it could not open properly. He thought that through certain manoeuvres he could open it properly, but this was not to be. Bear came hurtling to the ground at a high speed crushing three of

his back vertebrae. This was a big blow for Bear. The doctors initially thought that he would be paralysed for life or that he would have no use of his legs. It seemed that life had dealt him a big blow which he would never overcome.

He recalls that during this time, faith played an important role in his life. He refers to it as the 'backbone of my life'. At that specific moment he was experiencing a weakness in his life, he could appreciate the strength that faith was giving him. He started a twelve month rehabilitation programme and slowly started to show progress. In a short time he showed signs of improvement and what had previously seemed impossible, that is being able to walk again, now seemed possible. When he finished his rehabilitation programme he put all his energy into a dream he had had from a young age to climb Mount Everest!

Eighteen months after his accident, 23 year old Bear Grylls' wish came true, wish and he even set a record by being the youngest climber ever on Mount Everest. Since then he has had many adventures, one of which was crossing the North Atlantic Ocean in an open boat!

Bear was once asked whether faith is like a crutch holding up a maimed person, to be discarded when no longer needed. He replied that he often resorted to crutches because, apart from being well known for his adventures, he was also known for the many times he has broken his legs! He continued by saying that for him faith is like a backbone, which takes upon itself all that one encounters in life. Isaiah's words hold very true for him: "but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (Is 40, 31)

Jesus in the desert

Jesus had been in the desert for forty days. In the bible, the desert is the place where God speaks to the heart of man. It is also the place where man is tested and so it is in this place that the devil tempts Jesus. In this way the Gospels show us the questions regarding Jesus' true identity and his messianic mission. At that time, many were waiting for the Messiah. They were expecting a

political Messiah who would free the Jews, once and for all, from the oppression they were living in. However, as had been evident in the Book of Prophets, Jesus was not to be a political saviour. On the other hand, the devil tempted Jesus into believing that such a redeemer could exist, making him more popular and welcome. Jesus' answer to these temptations was the Word of God itself.

The main reason for the narration of these temptations is not to tell us about what Jesus went through. Rather, they illustrate the most common temptations that man faces and to which he often succumbs to.

In the first temptation, the devil tries to convince Jesus to eat. But man does not live on bread alone. The bread represents all we work

He had already been in the desert for 40 days, in silent prayer and meditation, when the deceiver came to tempt him.

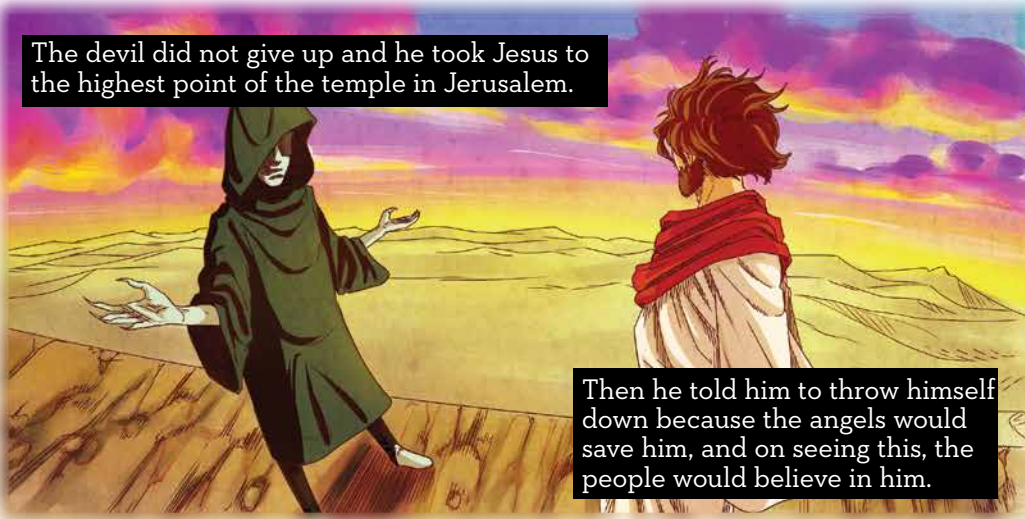


If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.



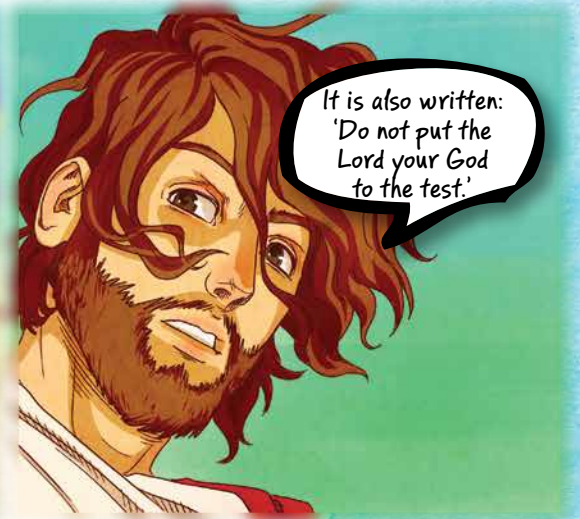
It is written that man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

The devil did not give up and he took Jesus to the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem.



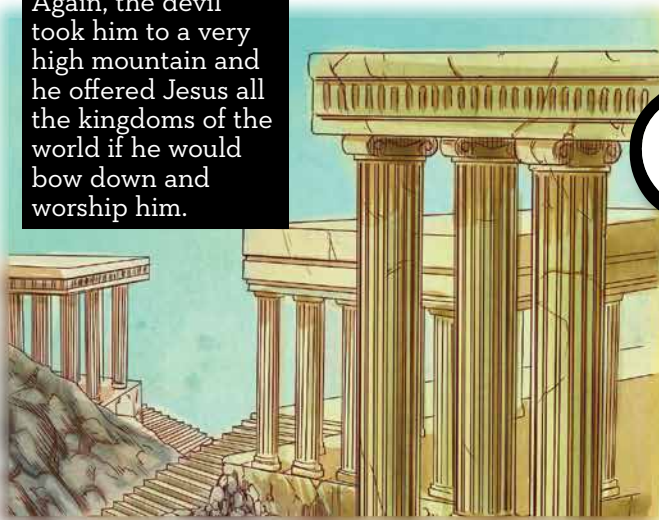
Then he told him to throw himself down because the angels would save him, and on seeing this, the people would believe in him.

It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'

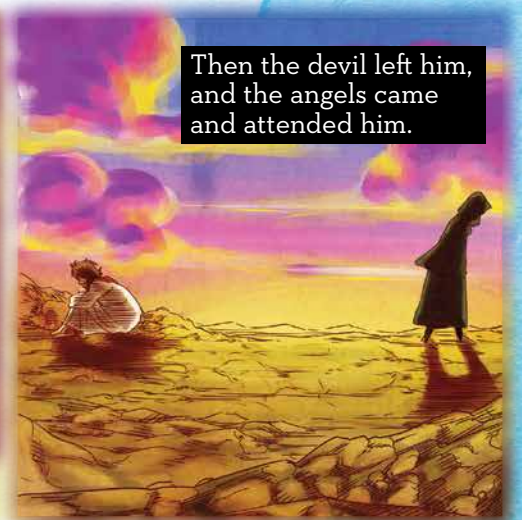


Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and he offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if he would bow down and worship him.

Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'



Then the devil left him, and the angels came and attended him.



for and earn in life. Jesus shows us the importance of having priorities, and to differentiate between what is more important and less important. If we mix up our priorities we may end up not finding the time to do what is most important.

The second temptation is about choosing to do the easiest, though not necessarily the best, option. If he wanted, Jesus could have been a powerful political Messiah, an impressive Messiah, a Messiah who attracted many followers. But Jesus wanted the people to believe in him not because of the miracles, but because they understood that the way he was proposing was in fact the way to true life. The way Jesus showed us is the way of the cross, the way in which one, like a seed, must die to be able to bear fruit. Up to till the end, Jesus only wants to

please the Father. We cannot plan all our life; we must repeatedly stop to hear God's leading voice.

In the third temptation, the devil promises Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if only he would bow down and worship him. This is the temptation posed by the idols in our lifetime. At times we create false gods and we come to depend on them, thinking that they will be our salvation. But Jesus shows us that only God is Lord of our lives, and we should adore him alone. We choose to adore other persons, or ourselves or even material things, when we give them too much importance. This however, will confuse us and hold us back from maturing and discovering God in our lives, and who we truly are. In reality, the temptations of Jesus are our

temptations. We need to be strong not to give in to these temptations. This is why we need to search for God's voice and obey him, because this is the voice of truth. Being a disciple of Jesus means following him, praying that we do not give in to our temptations which come both from the outside and from the inside, especially in times when we are not clear about what we want and about the reason for living. The first commandments states : 'I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me.' If we have other gods, sometimes even unknowingly, it is difficult to love God and others. When God is not our all, we might put ourselves at the centre, becoming egoistic persons instead of being of service to others. We would be arrogant rather than humble and would seek revenge rather than forgiveness.

Temptations in life

In life we do not only meet those who will help us but also those who hold us back. This is all the work of the Devil. But does the Devil exist?

One of the greatest dangers is believing that the Devil does not exist, or when we do not bother about his existence. Both in the New and the Old Testament, we find references that confirm the existence of the Devil, such as the book of Job. In Gerasa, Jesus himself speaks to the Devil. Jesus is the centre of our belief and his power always overcomes that of the Devil. So we need not be afraid, because if Jesus is with us, no one can be against us!

The Catechism of the Church teaches that wrong doing is not something abstract. We find numerous experiences of persons who were tempted by the devil, for example Saint Pio of Petrelcina and Saint John M Vianney. Since they were doing so much good in Jesus' name, the Devil tempted them like he had tempted Jesus in the desert.

'LEAD US NOT TO TEMPTATION'

These words from the Our Father, should not be understood as God actually leading us into temptation. God does not tempt us. Temptations are part and parcel of our daily lives, and sometimes a result of the choices we make. In his letter, Saint James says: 'When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.' (1, 13-14)

Our challenge is to understand what we are going through in our innermost self. Jesus himself says: "Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them" (Mark 7, 15).






Pray

When going through a rough time, read these words for encouragement:

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it"

(1 Cor 10, 13)

Pray that you are able to overcome your temptations, and ask God for the wisdom to choose the right way to move forward.



The more we do not know ourselves, the more we are at risk of being weak and vulnerable. On the other hand, there is also another reality which can confuse us: friends and situations for which

we are not prepared, events which we do not understand, and many other circumstances. This is why Jesus often repeats the phrase 'be on guard'! The Devil tempts us, after all he even tempted Jesus himself. He always tries to instil doubt about ourselves, our capabilities and about God.

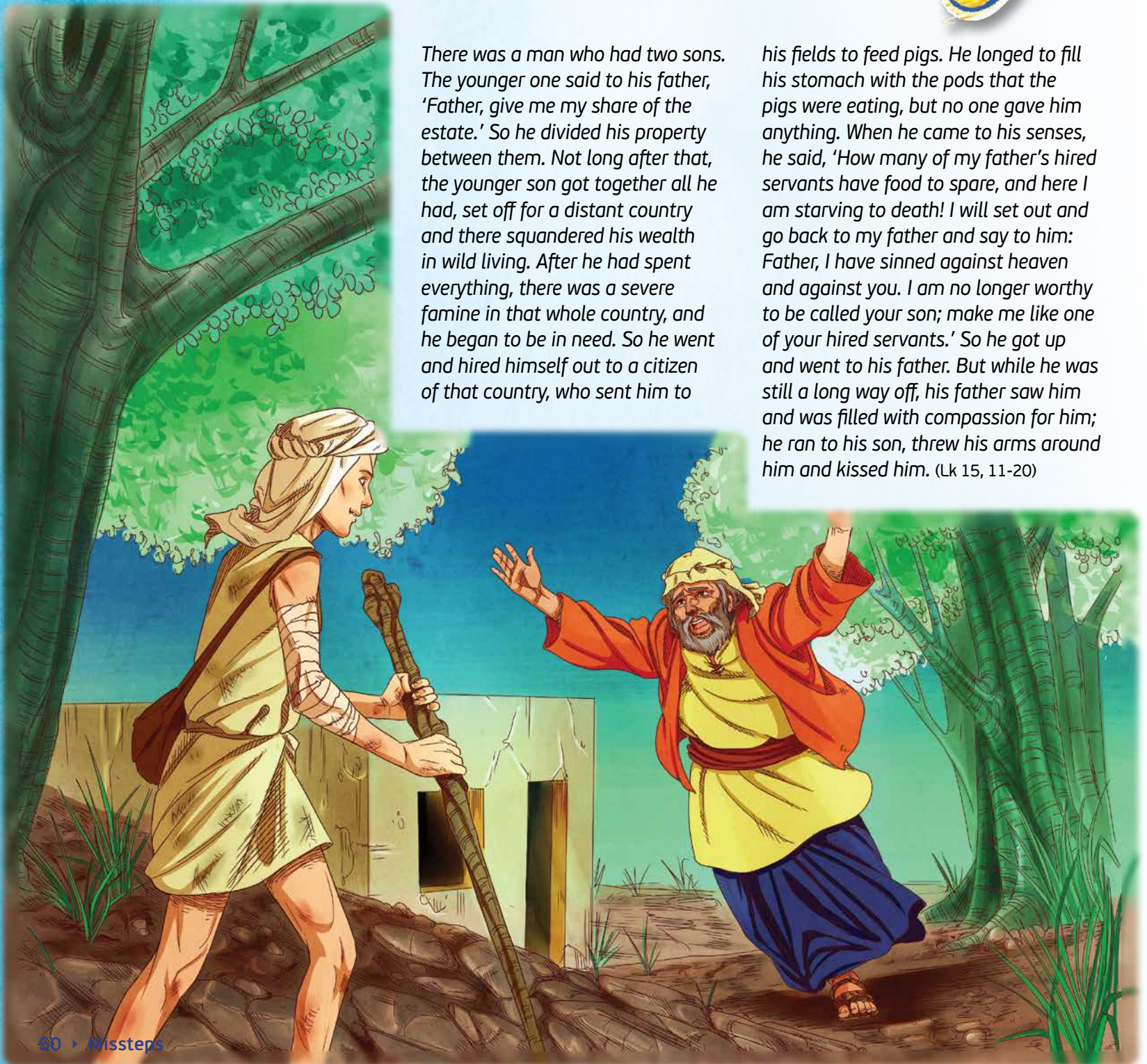
According to the gospel of Saint Mark, Jesus' life was one long battle against the Devil. But Jesus offers a solution, or rather a weapon against sin. This is the Word of God, which guides us and lights up our path so that we may find our way even in times of darkness. Therefore if we want to be able to face these temptations with force, we need to be

prepared. Similar to what Jesus did, we can do this by reading and meditating the Word of God. We also have the sacraments, especially the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist, which help us and give us the strength to move towards God. It is also beneficial if during the day, we move away from the hustle and bustle to pray and fast. If we are unable to say no to little things, how can we say no to even bigger temptations? Charity is also a means through which we move away from temptation, because the Devil is always trying to separate us from others. The Church has always considered these as armour against temptation.

In guise of liberty

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to

his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (Lk 15, 11-20)





Did you know?

At the time of the parable, fathers, behaved according to a number of specific rules. One of them was that they never ran. They wore long robes, so running would have made them lift up their clothes. This would definitely not suit the dignity of a Jewish man!

Moreover, for the father to reply to his son, the son was expected to have spoken with respect. Not only did this father not wait for his son to ask pardon, but he runs to him to kiss and hug him. Jesus wanted to show God's infinite love for us.

DECISIONS

Through this parable Jesus shows us that even when our decisions, separate us from God, or we no longer seek him, God still gives us freedom, and he does not impose himself on us. Nonetheless he waits until we realise and understand what we did.

The son was free, so he took the decision which he thought was best for him. At the end he realised that this was not the case. In fact, the decisions he took brought about consequences which he was not expecting!

His first decision was to take his share of his father's goods and his second decision was to leave his home and see what better chances

he could find elsewhere. At the end, maybe without much thinking, he decided to waste all his money.

Although he was free to choose as he wanted, he only realised what he did when he suffered the consequences. His choices brought about different results from those he was expecting. In fact instead of living more independently he ended up alone, in misery and hunger.

LETTING GO OF THE PAST

After many useless dreams which made him take some hasty and wrong decisions, the young man had time to think about what he had passed through. He realised that he had to take three new decisions to make up for the earlier wrong ones. The first step

was to admit that he had made a wrong decision and he had to decide to change. Then he had to get up and go back to his father. The third move was to admit that he had behaved badly towards his father and he had to make amends.

As soon as he returns home, the story changes drastically. The father's love surpasses all his son's attitudes and his forgiveness heals all the existing wounds. Freedom does not mean that one does whatever one wants. Rather it means the ability to choose what is of most benefit. When you realise that you have done wrong, you are able to go back on your decisions to find the right way once again.

True Freedom

What does it mean to be free?

What is freedom?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes freedom as the power 'to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility' and 'human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness' (1731). This means that we are free to choose between good and bad. The reason for the troubles of the world come primarily from this capacity to choose. At times, man chooses what is wrong because he believes that by so doing, he will be freer. But this, may lead one to restrictions thus constraining the person, rather than freeing him.

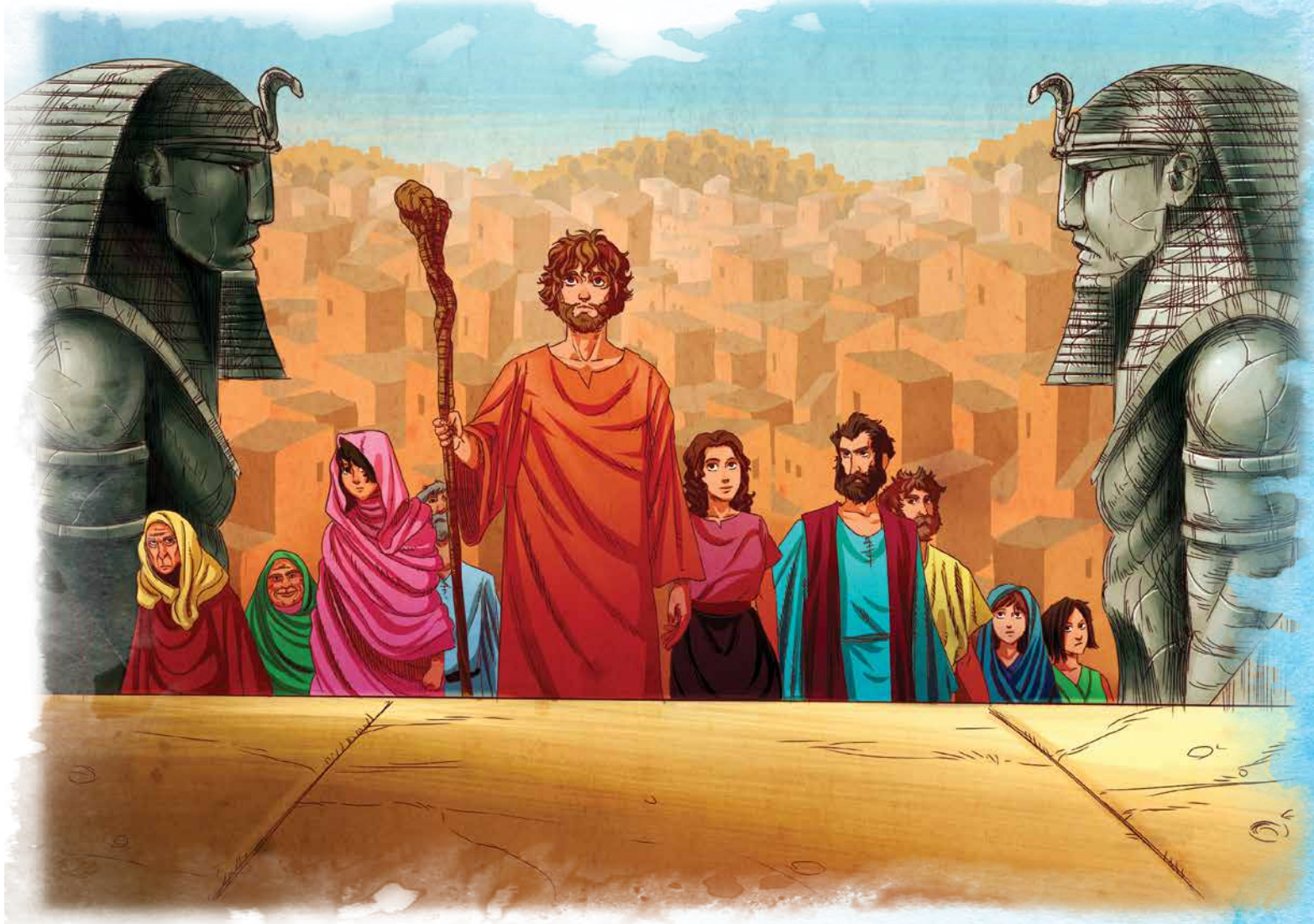
Man dreams of freedom when it is lacking. This is the story of many nations. History is full of stories of wars waged for liberty and national identity. In 2011, the world witnessed the process of the so called 'Arab Spring', a change which started because many people wanted to obtain their rights.

What are we ready to do to obtain our freedom and then not to lose it for petty things?

Did you know?

Dignitatis Humanæ, one of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, speaks about religious freedom. This document insists that one must never feel pressurised by society with regard to his worship, stressing that one should never go against his conscience. Human dignity asks that every person must have religious freedom.





MOSES

Moses is a central figure in the story of the Jewish people. In fact he is mentioned 750 times in the Old Testament and 80 times in the New Testament. He did not want to see his people suffer. So he accepted God's call to represent his people and to be instrumental in their freedom from slavery under the Egyptians. This challenge filled him with doubt and anxiety; but since he had God's promise he accepted this test.

Moses did his best to try and persuade the Pharaoh to allow let the Jews leave. But the Pharaoh refused. This brought about a struggle between Moses, in the name of God and the Pharaoh. The Bible tells of ten plagues which struck Egypt, but Pharaoh did not

give in until the last one. And even then, after letting the Jews go, he stubbornly changed his mind. When the people of Israel arrived at the Red Sea, God showed all his power and the Egyptians, because of their persistence, suffered great losses.

JESUS AND ISRAEL

Many compare the story of the people of Israel with the coming of Jesus to free us from sin. This parallelism is evident when the Red Sea closes in on the Egyptians to free the Israelites. Similarly the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan was the beginning of the sacrament which freed us from original sin.

After crossing the Red Sea the Israelites spend 40 years in the desert and slowly they change from

a people who made bad choices to the Chosen People of God. This can be likened to the 40 days Jesus spends in the desert after his baptism, where he battles against the temptations of the devil.

Baptism initiates a journey towards freedom. The baptised are anointed with the oil of the catechumens and chrism to receive the strength to renounce the evil doings of the Devil (CCC 1237).

To be a Christian means that the seed of new life has been sown, and one starts on a journey which lasts a lifetime. During this journey our relationship with Jesus changes us slowly and shows us sin so that we may be free from all that holds us back from maturing and being truly free and fully alive.

The journey of Moses

Our character or personality is a set of characteristics which make us different from each other. Although we are born with various qualities, there are others characteristics which we form throughout our lifetime. Different circumstances and experiences affect our character. These may be either positive or negative. Therefore character building offers a big challenge. We need to choose the circumstances which may affect us. This is very important for us.

The freer we are, the better the chance of growing up and maturing into who we really are meant to be. This may not be the case if we

allow people or events to condition our behaviour. God has been likened to a sculptor with a marble slab, chisel and hammer. Patiently God shapes our character into the one he has in mind. However we may resist this. But if we allow ourselves to become who we truly are, we will be more free, without masks, without pretensions and full of sincerity.

The Letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament refers to some of Moses' characteristics which emerged after he had accepted God's call and allowed God to lead him. The same happens to us.

HE WAS ABLE TO SAY NO

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter." (Hebrews 11, 24)

'No' may seem a negative word. But it may also save us from a number of problems. The strength of one's character shows in one's ability to say 'no' when confronted with something that is wrong. When tempted, Jesus was able to say 'no', and in turn he did his Father's will.

HE WAS ABLE TO CHOOSE THE LASTING OPTION

"He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin." (Hebrews 11, 25) It was not an easy choice. Moses let go of all luxuries and riches to be able to answer God's call.

HE WAS A MAN OF FAITH AND GREAT COURAGE

"By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger." (Hebrews 11, 27) Moses was not a perfect man.

Like anyone else, he had his shortcomings and his fears. But faith gave him the necessary courage to face the difficult situations he found himself in. During our life we may go through moments which frighten us. This is why we need courage. It does not mean that we will not be afraid, but courage gives us the strength to do what we believe is right. Showing our feelings, speaking about what is bothering us and changing our ways need courage.

HE HAD VISION

"By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land." (Hebrews 11, 29) Moses knew what he wanted, who to listen to and where to go. He was determined to arrive at his destination in spite of the difficulties encountered along the way. In the book of Deuteronomy we find that Moses' eyes did not dim, that is he was clear about what he had to do. This shows the importance of having a clear direction so as not to feel confused.

THE JOURNEY OF ODYSSEUS

The Iliad is an epic poem of Homer which speaks of the Greek kingdom which overthrew Troy through the cleverness of Odysseus. Troy was well known as an invincible city surrounded by strong bastions. Praying to the gods was useless, until Odysseus came up with the idea of the wooden horse. It was a simple enough plan. They were to pretend that they had given up and leave a wooden horse outside the gates as a sign of peace. When the people of Troy saw the enemy ships leaving their shores, they brought the horse into the city and spent a night in celebration. Little did they imagine that this would bring about their destruction. Inside the horse were the enemy's best soldiers and at night they attacked and won the city. Odysseus turns to his gods and tells them that he had managed to win the war without their help. This angers the gods, especially Poseidon who vowed to kill him. The account of Odysseus continues from where the Iliad leaves off. It tells of Odysseus' journey to his homeland. He meets with many difficulties, which he manages to overcome with the help of Athena, the goddess of wisdom. This journey helps Odysseus to get rid of his pride which had led him to fight against the other gods. The suffering and struggles that Odysseus met during his voyage helped him to nurture the virtue of meekness, which then made him a wise and good leader.





REVIEW

A KEY WORDS

Briefly explain the following terms:

- ▶ Challenges and missteps
- ▶ Temptations
- ▶ Freedom

B MAIN IDEAS

Write a paragraph about the following:

- ▶ How can we overcome the missteps we encounter?
- ▶ What do we learn from the episode of Jesus in the desert?
- ▶ Is it good to say 'no'?

C STOP AND THINK

Using what you have learnt in this chapter, answer the following:

- ▶ Why is it dangerous to deny the existence of the devil?
- ▶ How can the parable of the Prodigal Son help you make wise decisions?

D FAMILY DISCUSSION

Discuss the following with members of the family:

- ▶ Talk about someone who managed to overcome his difficulties and continued his journey with a more mature faith.
- ▶ Speak about the adventures of Bear Grylls and his experiences.

Missteps



How does God speak to us?

PREPARE YOURSELF

Where do we look for God?

Do we only use words to communicate?

TICK ✓ THE WORDS YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH:

☐

Divine plan

☐

Sign

☐

Communication

☐

Worship

☐

Courage

☐

Prayer

☐

Situation

☐

Experience

God is love

During the Christmas holidays, we spent a day in Gozo. My elder brother asked me to go with him for a walk in the countryside. We left Marsalforn, where we were staying, and started walking towards the hill called "tas-Salvatur". It was a beautiful sunny day, and when we were only halfway there, I was already complaining because I was parched! But my brother insisted that we must make it to the top of the hill, and there was nothing I could do about it. As we walked

up, the statue of the Saviour on the top of the hill seemed to get larger and larger... From the bottom of the hill, it had seemed so small! When we got to the top, I forgot my thirst for a couple of minutes as I looked at the statue which looked so big up close, and took in the beautiful view. We sat down for a short while, admiring the countryside and enjoying the breeze.

We sat there in silence. All we could hear was the sound of running water, because it had rained a few days before. I was forced to stop and think. In fact, it is at moments like this that you truly meet yourself, without having anything or anyone to disturb you. You can have a good

look at nature and see how it works. Whereas in summer everything had become arid and barren, now there was greenery everywhere, and some farmers could be seen in the fields. In moments like this, we are almost forced to think about God and all we have learned about him creating everything and keeping it in being. And we ask ourselves if this is true – because there are people who say that God does not exist.

In such surroundings, it seems the mind cannot stop thinking. However, after some time, we realised that it was getting late, and we had to walk back. As soon as we arrived home, I started telling my parents about the beautiful view, and my mother

immediately answered: "You can see how great God is; there is so much that we should thank Him for!"

At that moment, I felt again what I had experienced in the silence on the hill. And I continued asking myself: how often do I look for God, and where do I look for him? Who knows how often he speaks to me and I am not aware of this? The stillness and beauty of nature had forced me to stop and think. And I realised how hard it is for us to hear the voice of God in the hustle and bustle of everyday life!

What role does God have in my life? Different people will answer this question differently, because we do not all experience God in the same way. Some people are compelled to stop and think about God through the silence of the countryside and the beauty of nature. Some experience him when they meet others in a small group, or during a day-retreat organised by the parish. Then there are others who look upon God as a vending machine, which is used when needed. Nowadays, we live such a fast life, where every moment is packed to the full, that many people do not even have the time to remember that God exists, let alone contemplate about how much he loves them.

On the other hand, there are many who often feel the presence of God during the day. They thank God for what they go through, or they stop to ask his help before doing something. Some people pray regularly at the beginning and at the end of each day. There are others who turn to God even when things are not going well, because they know they will have his help and support.

A CONTAGIOUS LOVE

Mother Teresa was born in Albania, but lived most of her life in India, where she dedicated her life to the poorest people. She rarely preached, but her whole life was a sermon about God's love, especially towards the poorest of the poor. She was not afraid of catching an illness. In her eyes, one could see the love she had for everyone around her. The deep love within her heart helped her to overcome any fear she had. In spite of her small stature and her frailty, her great love left a mark on the world. When she died, she was mourned by believers and non-believers alike. People of other religions wept for her, because when God's love is manifest within us, it overcomes all our differences.

We are all looking for love. At times, it is not easy to find genuine love, and the reason may be that we are searching in the wrong places. However, there is one place where we can find a love that will not disappoint us. This is the same love which Mother Teresa experienced.

It is the love which comes from God, because God is love.

But where can we find this true love? Where can we find God who is love? Jesus gives us the answer when he says: "No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15,13). Although it is not easy to see God's love in death, God showed us the fullness of his love when he became man and was willing to die for us. God still shows us his love through so many people who dedicate themselves to us and give us their love. Love is the key to help us experience God. If we can love ourselves and others with the same love that God loves us, we will experience God in our lives in the same way Mother Teresa did. This experience will make us fully human. Nowadays, our world and our culture provide us with opportunities to do so many things. However, there is a great lack of love and it is up to us to communicate this love.

We can love because God loves us...and we can give because God has given us so much!



Esther's story

There are many people who have allowed God to work in their lives. Through them, God has fulfilled his plan of salvation, and they have shown great strength while giving witness to him. We shall have a look at the experience related by Hadassah, or rather, Esther, Queen of Persia.

"Although I was a Jewish girl, I did not live in Jerusalem. My parents had been exiled to Persia. After some time, they died and I started living with a cousin called Mordecai. One day, we heard the news that King Xerxes was searching his kingdom for a beautiful girl to be his wife. My cousin Mordecai told me to go with the other girls to see whether the king would choose me. I had to be careful not to say anything about my

family, or reveal that I had Jewish roots, and thus I changed my name from Hadassah to Esther, which means star. The king was going to meet us individually, but before this we had to go through twelve months of preparation. Finally, the day arrived. I was very excited. What happened was totally unexpected: the king chose me from among all the young girls, and he gave me the queen's crown.





Look it up!

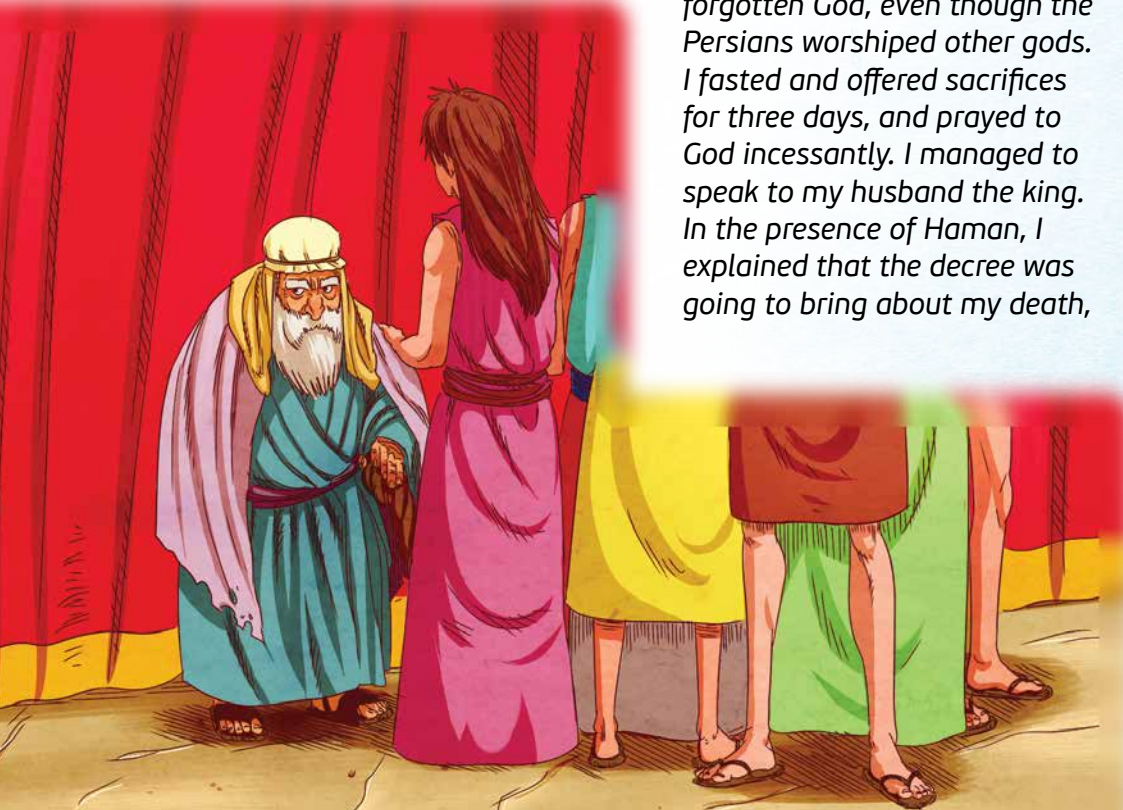
Have you ever heard of Joan of Arc? She was a poor young woman who lived in the fifteenth century. Because of the help she gave the King, France won a number of battles. Look up more information about this saint.

In the king's palace there was a high-ranking officer called Haman, who hated the Jews. He made the king issue a decree ordering all the Jews in his kingdom to be killed. I discovered that the reason why Haman wanted to kill the Jews was that my cousin Mordecai

refused to bow before him. Mordecai would not kneel before him because this was a sign of adoration that was reserved for God alone. The Jews were very anxious, and they started fasting and offering sacrifices, begging God to save them. Although I lived in the palace, I had never forgotten God, even though the Persians worshiped other gods. I fasted and offered sacrifices for three days, and prayed to God incessantly. I managed to speak to my husband the king. In the presence of Haman, I explained that the decree was going to bring about my death,

since I was a Jew, and also the death of all my people. The king was very angry and he ordered his servants to kill Haman. God's people were saved once again. The Jews organised great feasts to give glory to God who had not forgotten them, even though they were in exile. I realised that I was part of God's plan. He had wanted me to become the queen of Persia so that I could save his people from that cruel person."

Esther was a woman of faith and courage. She showed great love towards God and towards her people, the Jews. Even though she was not aware of it, she was an important instrument helping God to save the Jews. She accepted God's plan, and she never forgot him, even though she became the queen of Persia.



How are my communication skills?

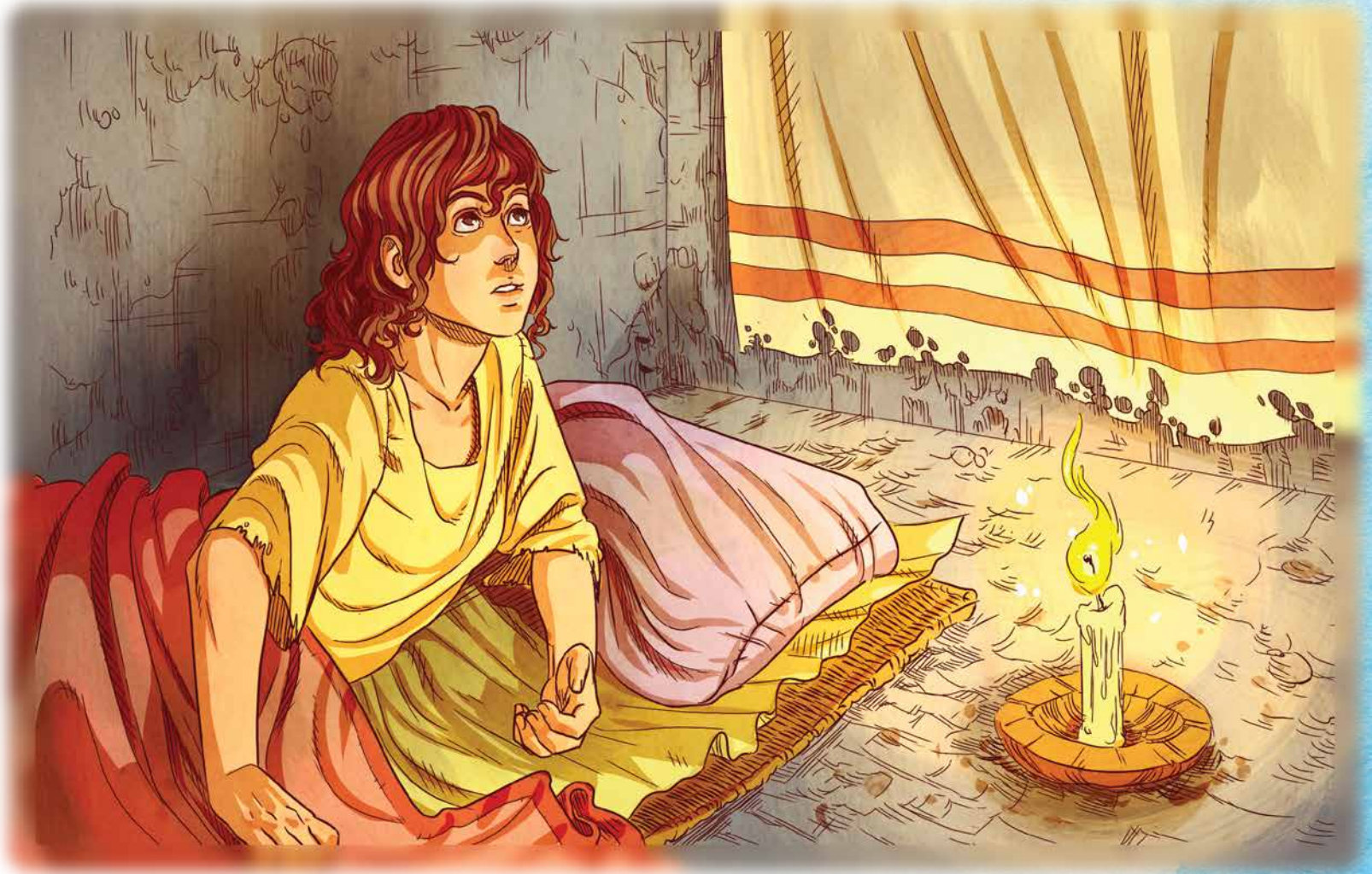
Nowadays, communication is essential. We cannot even imagine life without what we call the networks of communication that make our life what it is, for better or for worse. On a simpler level, one important aspect of communication is how we communicate among ourselves. Communication can take place when there is a person who is passing on a message, and someone who is supposed to be receiving it. This process may be interrupted, and communication does not take place, and the message does not arrive, either because the person who was communicating did not deliver the

message well, or because the one who should have received it could not do so, for various reasons.

In our lives, communication is very important. There are various ways a message can be delivered. We start communicating when we are still babies. Babies cry when they are hungry or in pain in order to attract their parents' attention. When I am angry, I communicate my anger to others. A person who cannot communicate feels angry and frustrated. When there is sincere communication between two

Did you know?

We do not only use words to communicate. In fact, a number of studies have shown that only 10% of our communication consists of words. We communicate also through the tone we use, gestures and through our body language.



people, they feel much happier and bad feelings are avoided.

In the Bible, we meet Samuel who was a young man who had excellent communication skills. Everyone listened to him. We can see this through his experiences. Probably everyone remembers what happened to Samuel when he was still a child. He was asleep in the temple and he heard someone calling him. At first, he thought it was Eli, and he went to see what the elderly man wanted. However, Eli told him he had not called him. This happened three times. Finally, Eli realised that it was God who was calling Samuel, and he told him that if he heard the voice again, he should answer: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." God called Samuel again, and this time Samuel spoke to God. God had a special plan for Samuel, and Samuel accepted his

role in this plan. He would become God's prophet.

He gave them divine knowledge which they did not know. (7,3)

He helped Saul overcome his fear. (10, 3-6)

He encouraged the people to follow Saul as their new king. (10, 24)

He taught people many things. (10, 25)

His messages gave the people direction and hope for the future. (12, 20-25)

If we read the first book of Samuel, we realise how skilled Samuel was when communicating with people around him. This talent helped him become very close to the people, and thus he could lead

them to God. Samuel's secret was to remain in contact with God. He would talk to God as he would with a very dear friend.

As in the case of Samuel and Esther, there are many people who have accepted God in their lives. We do not have to search further in the Bible or look far away. All we have to do is to take a look around us, and we will notice that there are many people whose lives resemble that of Samuel and Esther. There are many stories of people who lived for others because they accepted God's love, a love that transforms us. These people were leaders and prophets who have inspired others and leaving a mark on the world, that has lasted through time, and not only in their lifetime. The strength of these people came from their close union with God.

Reading the signs

I was riding a bus and, as it drove through the streets, I observed the many different road signs which guide traffic. When they are followed carefully, there are fewer accidents and the roads are more organised. Suddenly I realised how often I had passed through the same streets without bothering about these signs. If everyone were to observe these traffic signs, our minds would be much more at rest. However, even though the

signs are there to help us, we often hear people complaining because they cannot pass through a certain street or because they cannot turn in a particular direction. This means that they would not have understood, even though they have a responsibility towards themselves and towards others.

Our life is full of signs. But I must know how to read them and understand them. Even God speaks

to us through signs. These signs may be people who try to help us and guide us, or circumstances we go through. Nothing happens by chance. We must be careful not to let events take us by surprise. We must observe everything, and pause briefly to try to understand what is taking place. The choice is in our hands.

Just as God had a plan for his Chosen People, he has a plan for us now. God has a plan for each



and every one of us. But how can we know God's plan for us? God sends us frequent signs to help us understand what he wants from us. We do not find these signs along the road, as in the case of traffic signs, and neither do we find an angel flitting around at home. God makes use of all we go through to pass on his message. But we must not be distracted. Every situation we go through is part of God's plan for us. We must pause and reflect on the situation, and use the Word of God to try to understand where to find God, and what message he is communicating to us. Some may say that this sounds absurd, and they may ask whether God is near us all the time, communicating with different people. St Augustine, who passed through a wide range of experiences, wrote this when he was relating the story of his life: "You start searching for God when you find him!" This means that it is only when you experience God in your life that you start to look for him in all you do.

Life is a gift, and the more we appreciate it, the more we realise that it is vital not to be distracted from what is important. Being distracted means living a life that is unfocused. Such a person is simply exists, rather than truly lives. And when we are simply existing, what happens to us or around us can overwhelm us, because we cannot accept events when we cannot understand why they are happening to us. When God is a part of our lives, it makes a great difference. But we must look for him, and we must be able to listen to him and give him space. If this space is always filled up, we will be living only for ourselves, and we will turn to God only when things are not going well. We can see many examples of this – people who say they believe in God, but God is not actually part of their lives.

We are human, and we cannot always understand God's signs. We go through many moments of darkness. Even people who believe in God go through these moments. Believing in God does not mean that there are no moments of doubt. In fact, we go through moments of pain and suffering which could crush us if we are not strong. These are the moments that raise many questions. And the answers to these questions cannot be found in a book, and they cannot be given to us by someone else. We must look for the answers deep within ourselves, when we are alone. These are moments when we are truly looking for God, and we realise that at these moments God himself is looking for us. It is good to ask why: Why did this happen to me? Why do bad things happen to good people? During moments of pain, our minds and hearts are full of

questions. This is natural, and it does not go against our faith in God.


Sometimes we suffer because of the wrong choices we make, and thus we will be suffering the consequences of our actions. There are other instances when we cannot understand what caused our suffering. And there is also suffering that is caused by other people. When we are going through any type of suffering, God cares for us and supports us so that we do not become victims. We have earlier referred to God as a sculptor working on a piece of marble; he can already visualise the statue he is carving, and he continues working with his chisel with infinite patience. God is very patient with us, even when we are not patient with ourselves. Am I allowing God to carve me into the statue he has in mind?

Did you know?

There are many signs from God in the Bible. These formed part of God's plan for his people. Sometimes these consisted of amazing events and miracles, making the people aware of God's greatness, and eventually making them turn to him. At other times, they were warning signs which made the people realise they were on the wrong track. Sometimes they were signs through which God encouraged the people by showing them that he was present and that they were not alone.

How do I pray?





A farmer was once returning home from the market when one of the wheels of his cart came off. This meant that he would arrive home late. He suddenly realised that he had forgotten his prayer book and he would not even have time to pray. Therefore, he turned to God and said: "Lord, today I made a big mistake. This morning I was in a hurry, and I forgot my prayer book at home. I have become so forgetful that I can't even remember any one of my daily prayers. Therefore, I have to pray in a different way. Today I shall recite the alphabet slowly five times. You know everything and I ask you to arrange the letters into the prayer which I can't remember." And God turned to his angels and said: "I have heard many prayers today, but this is definitely the best one because, although it is simple, it comes from the heart and it is truly sincere."

(From the writings of Anthony de Mello)

We can pray in different ways. Some people pray in silence; they steer clear of all distractions and spend some quiet time with the Lord. In this type of prayer, we need not to use words. When we pray, we talk to God and thus we must give him a chance to answer. In order to hear him, we must be quiet. Some people read a passage from Scripture and meditate on it. There are people who find it helpful to write down their thoughts and what they have been through that day and they use these for their prayer. Music can also be a starting point for prayer. There are other people who prefer to pray regularly with someone else. Then there is spontaneous prayer. Very probably, we do not always use the same method when praying, but a combination, depending on the time, on our needs and on our feelings at that particular moment. Which method do you find most helpful?

Our friends often challenge us to do something, and we usually take up

the challenge. We may notice that we are enjoying what we are doing, and we may want to continue doing it. For example, someone may want to join a volleyball team, but he may realise that he is not fit enough to do so, because he eats food that is not very healthy and he does not do any exercise. And his friends challenge him. Since he wants to join the team, he makes a promise to himself and he starts exercising every day and eating healthily. He manages to join the team and he keeps up his healthy diet, because he realises that this is to his advantage.

There is another challenge we may take up, a challenge which we may not have experienced before: the challenge to pray. Try to find time for prayer this week. Before you take up the challenge, it is important to decide when and where you will be praying. Then decide what you want to pray for: what do you want God to do in

your life?... Perhaps there is a difficulty which you or someone close to you is experiencing. During this week, pray with this aim in mind.

Prayer is a conversation with God. We do not need special words or a special method to pray. We may pray out aloud or we may pray silently, in our hearts. We should feel at ease. God knows what we want and what we need, but he wants us to turn to him and tell him our wishes. We may start our prayer time with prayers we have learnt; we may use music in the background and talk to God as if he is physically near us. At the end of the week, it would be good to have an evaluation. We should keep in mind that prayer is not a sign of weakness. Even Jesus prayed; and we should remember that he said: "Ask, and it will be given to you." This should encourage us in our prayer.



Amazing Love!

Did you know?

The Song of Songs can be read as a portrayal of the love of God for his people. This song is a dialogue between a young man and his beloved. We can visualise God as the Lover, and the people as the Beloved. We find this train of thought even in the New Testament, for example, in the Letter to the Ephesians, where Saint Paul speaks about Jesus' love for his Church.





'The Creation of Adam', by Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simone is one of the most famous sacred art painting ever produced and it is found . On the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. Michelangelo was born in Tuscany in 1475, and he was a highly gifted Renaissance artist: he was a sculptor, a painter, an architect, a poet and an engineer. He had a great influence on the development of art in the west.

He is considered one of the greatest artists in history, both as a sculpture, as well as a painter and architect. Among his masterpieces, we find the sculpture of the Pietà in the Vatican, and the statue of David in Florence.

On the other hand, there are many reproductions of The Creation of Adam, and there are also many imitations and caricatures. The inspiration for this painting

originates from the book of Genesis, where we are told that God created the human person "in his image and likeness". In Michelangelo's painting, God's hand is stretched out in order to touch Adam's. This is the moment when Adam becomes a new creation, different from the rest. The hands are depicted in such a way that it is clear that God is giving and Adam is receiving.

We believe in God who has wanted a relationship with man since the beginning of creation. God searches for us before we search for him. The Bible compares God's love for us to the relationship of two lovers. Two people who are in love try to spend time together; they dream together; they find time for each other; and they try to do many things together. This is the love God has for us... a truly amazing love. Jesus, God made man, gave us this love, and he also showed us how we can discover it.

Through Jesus, we build a relationship with God during our lives. This is what Jesus asks from all those who follow him: discipleship. The disciple is one who follows another. However,

in order to be disciples, we must listen to the voice of our shepherd and learn to distinguish it from others.

It is good for us to discover different methods of prayer according to the different experiences we are going through. When we want to praise God for what he has done for us and acknowledge his greatness, we use prayers of adoration and blessing. At times, we pray because we need help in a difficult decision we have to take, or because of illness, problems with our friends and family, or simply to ask for strength not to give up when faced with a difficult project. These are called prayers of petition. We do not only pray for our needs,

but also for those of others, and these are called prayers of intercession. When we receive something we have prayed for and we thank God, this is a prayer of thanksgiving. We also thank God for all he has given us: our beautiful talents, our family and friends, our health, and so many other things. Then there are also prayers where we ask for forgiveness: we ask pardon for what we have done wrong, or for the times we did not do our duty.

When we build up this type of relationship with God, we will find God in every experience we are going through, and our relationship with God will fill us with joy, in spite of the problems around us.

REVIEW

A KEYWORDS

Briefly explain the following terms:

- ▶ Communication
- ▶ Courage
- ▶ Guide

B MAIN IDEAS

Write a paragraph about the following:

- ▶ What should I do to communicate well with others?
- ▶ Prayer and me.
- ▶ To what can I compare God's love for me?

C STOP AND THINK

Using what you have learnt in this chapter, answer the following:

- ▶ How can you experience God in your life?
- ▶ What is the similarity between the signs we come across in our daily lives and God's plan for each and every one of us?

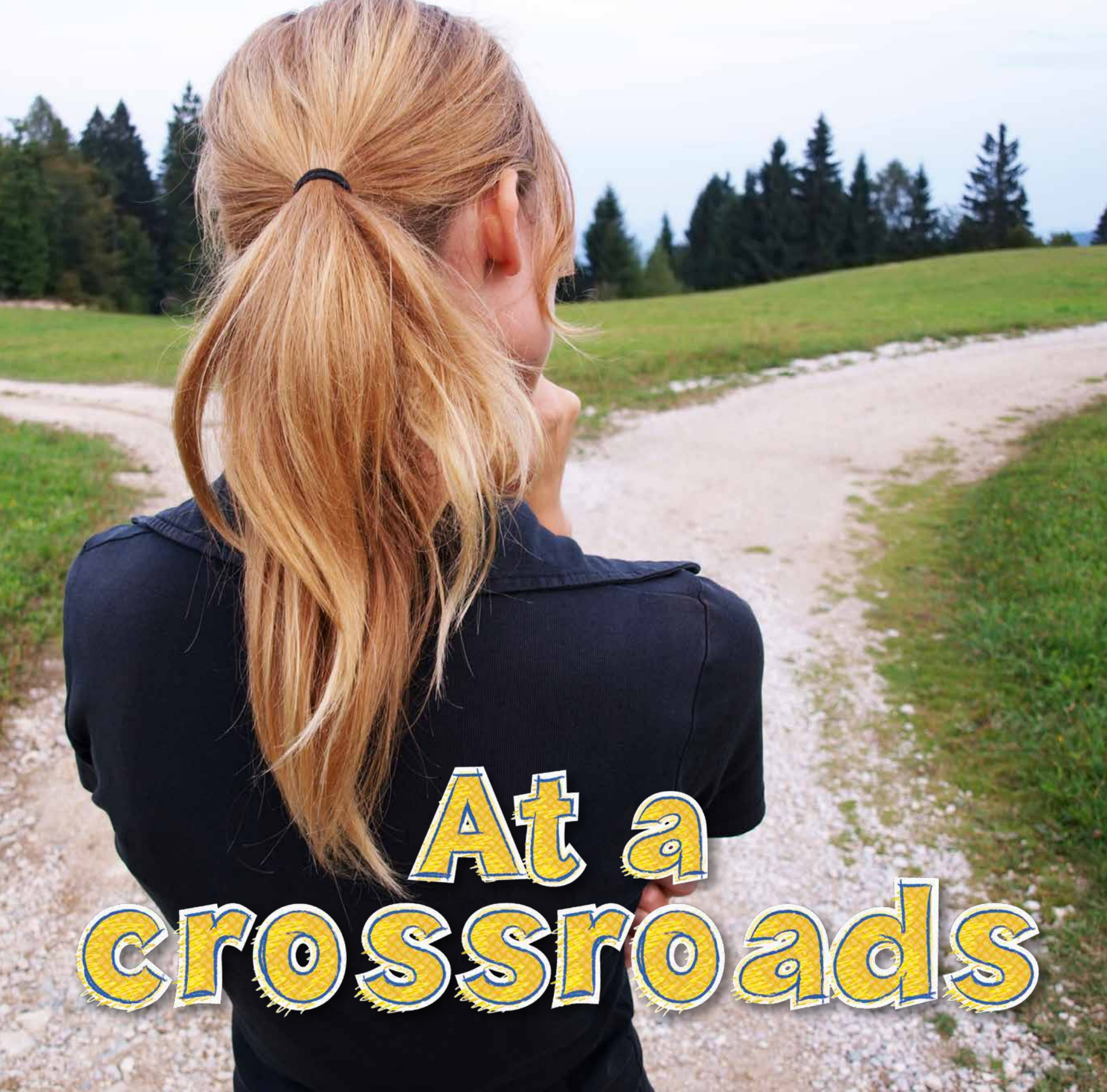
D FAMILY DISCUSSION

Discuss the following with members of the family:

- ▶ How can we improve communication among ourselves?



How does God speak to us?



At a crossroads

PREPARE YOURSELF:

Are there any signs to show that I am growing up?

Am I unique, or are others going through the same experience?

TICK ✓ THE WORDS YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH:

☐

Personality

☐

Philosophy of life

☐

Culture

☐

Values

☐

Reflection

☐

Maturity

☐

Dignity

A time for making decisions

One of the beautiful things about life is that it is an adventure. We do not remain the same. As time passes, we grow older and we change, and we are supposed to become more mature. We say 'supposed to' because it does not always happen that people who grow up become wiser and more mature too. Yet wisdom and maturity are necessary in life, especially in those moments when we need to take decisions that require a lot of thought.

We have discussed the seed that is planted within us at the very beginning of our lives, and how our life experiences influence us and help us develop if we face them with the right attitude. When we are still young, other people take decisions on our



Live it!

What do you do before making a decision? Do you think of the consequences, and how this decision is going to affect you? Have you ever ask for advice before making a decision? To whom do you turn for advice... parents, friends, the religious counsellor? Have you ever spoken to anyone else who has helped you make the right decision?





Imagine you were homeless and lived on the streets. How would you live? You would need to look for food and clothes. It would not be an easy life. In 1857 in Italy it was common for children to end up on the streets. Michele Magone was one such child. Like all his friends, he would steal in order to live. His companions were certainly not exemplary. One day, when he was thirteen years old, he met Don Bosco who took a personal interest in him. Michele was not happy with the way of life he was leading; some of his friends were already in prison. No one had ever bothered to speak to him. Don Bosco had an Oratory where he used to take care of children like Michele. Here Michele started experiencing a different way of life. He could study and he found help to change his behaviour, especially the way he spoke! When he first went to the Oratory, he did not really enjoy going to Church, and when he made an effort to go, he was usually restless. However, even this changed, and he soon became the first person to help others in need. In January 1859, Michele started feeling ill. He did not even want to play with his friends! He had an incurable illness. In spite of his difficult childhood, Michele wanted to change, and he managed to do so because of his strong determination. We too must not give up. Some tasks may be difficult to accomplish alone, but if we allow others to help us, we will definitely manage.

behalf. However, at a certain point in our lives, we have to become independent.

This is the time when we have to focus on the important things, and we cannot afford to let everything go by without reflecting deeply. We cannot simply live the moment, doing only what we want at that particular time, without thinking of the consequences of our decisions. If we take this attitude, the experiences we go through will not help us grow and develop. And the worst thing that can happen is that we grow older while our thoughts and emotions remain childish.

When we start discovering ourselves, and feel that we need to relate to others, we should also use our mind to take mature decisions. At this time we realise that there is a change in our self-concept, in our relationships with others, and also in our relationship with God. Our behaviour may be different, and we may have frequent mood swings. Even our attitude towards a number of things may change frequently. It is as if our character is going through a lot of upheaval, and thus even other people's attitudes towards us may change.

Our self-image may become very poor at this time. This is precisely why it is such a challenging period in our lives. We should not take hasty decisions on our own, and we certainly cannot afford to break off relationships with others and just do what we feel like. During this time, our moods change frequently, and we can easily be very happy one moment and very depressed a short time afterwards. However, this is a crucial time in our lives. If I take the right decisions now, I gradually change and develop, and reach my full potential. This is because I am not just one of many things created by God, but I am his masterpiece.

Autonomy and conflict



I can't understand my family! Whenever we're together we end up quarrelling. It is as if something within me wants to be independent from them. I keep on trying to do the exact opposite of what they say. When I heard them say that my long hair suits me, I had a hair cut. Whenever they tell me to study so that I can have a good career when I grow up, I tell them that I want to live my life my way. When I feel they are being too restrictive, I lose my temper and shout, or I simply leave the room without saying a word.

I wonder.....Was Petra right when she said that if they were to let me do whatever I like, I would probably say that they don't love me, and that they don't care? Who knows? Not even I know.



Many times we have felt like the people mentioned in this diary entry. Maybe we did not feel exactly the same, and perhaps we were not so dramatic. However, we have all experienced feelings we could not understand.

Have you ever felt that no one understands you?

Do you think you are the only one feeling like this, or do you think your friends are going through the same thing?

How can you help each other understand what is happening within you? And what would be the best thing to do?

In spite of the fact that you are going through a lot of changes, do you feel you should still appreciate the love of others?

Just as our relationships with others may become strained at this time of our lives, even our relationship with others can become tense. This is the time when we want to take our own decisions, become independent even from our own family, demand more freedom, and want to go out frequently without having a specific time to return home. This means there may be many new conflicts.

During this time, friends become very important, and thus I must choose my friends very carefully. We start feeling more relaxed with friends, and it is easier for us to open up to them, because we feel they are the only ones who can understand us. Though it is good

Delve deeper

Who are our friends?
What do I look for when choosing friends?
Do I give importance to their looks and their popularity with others, or to their characters?
It is important to have friends who really help me become a better person, and I too must be able to help them.

to develop closer relationships with friends, it is however important to keep up good relationships with our parents and the rest of the family. We must keep in mind that, although we may not be getting on well with our parents and any other person who looks after us, such as our grandparents, aunts and uncles, these persons still care very deeply for us.

What is happening within me?



Pray

When we are feeling extremely alone, perhaps abandoned even by our closest friends, we might think that God has forgotten us too. We are not the only ones to go through this. In Psalm 42, we detect this attitude in the psalmist. However, he recognises that God is near and has not forgotten him:

As a deer yearns for running streams, so I yearn for you, my God... I shall say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me?"

Why must I go around in mourning, harassed by the enemy?"

With death in my bones, my enemies taunt me; all day long they ask me: "Where is your God?"

Why so downcast, why all these sighs? Hope in God! I will praise him still, my Saviour, my God.



During this period in our lives, conflict is often present in our attitudes towards others and in our relationships with them, plus a lot of uncertainty regarding our self-image. This affects our attitude towards life itself, and also towards God.

This is the time when we are very worried about how others see us, and their opinion about us. However, although our looks are important, it is also vital for us to be concerned about what is taking place internally. There is the world where we are living; and then there is also the other world within us. And we must be concerned about what is happening in this world- the world within. If we do not develop a good relationship

within ourselves, we may get lost, and there will be many things in life which we would not be able to understand and accept.

Our opinion of ourselves may also have a great effect on us; for example, we may become very shy. We may start comparing ourselves to others. We may even feel that others are giving us the cold shoulder. Sometimes this compels us do anything just for the sake of being accepted by others. This may have a negative effect on us, because we may do certain things just to be liked. There is no doubt that at this stage in life, our relationships with people in authority also become strained, especially if they are people who like to

impose on us what we should or should not do.

When all is said and done, this is a beautiful time! It is however, also a very sensitive time! It is good for us to feel free, to keep on searching and exploring, and to ask the questions that are troubling our hearts and our minds. However, it is also important for us to have something stable which gives us security.

At this time in our lives, we should not look upon God as a sort of policeman who is observing us all the time in order to criticize and embarrass us or judge us. We should discover God as the one who loves us deeply, and who can help us understand what is taking place within us.

Falling into bad habits

What is a bad habit?

Do you know anyone who had to struggle to come out of a bad habit?

Do you think it is easy to overcome bad habits?

We must be careful not to let bad habits become a part of our lives. These habits, which are sometimes called vices, diminish the freedom which is one of God's greatest gifts to us. At this time in our lives, we must be particularly careful about acquiring bad habits. In reality, these bad habits can and do affect anybody but since we are going through so much unrest within ourselves, and in our relationships with others, we are very vulnerable. Sometimes we take up bad habits not because we want to, but in order to be accepted by a group we admire or are trying to befriend. When we take up a bad habit, it is very difficult to overcome it. This is because bad habits can easily become an important part of our lives, and they take the place of other good qualities we really need.

Some of these bad habits may harm our body and our health, although this may not be immediately obvious. As an example, one may mention Anorexia which is an eating disorder affecting young people who are afraid



"A DOC WITH SO MUCH HEART
IN THE RIGHT PLACE"
-INDIEWIRE

"THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE WINS"
-THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE



THE MEANING
OF LIFE
IS DISCOVERED
IN THE
EXPERIENCE

FEATURING THE MUSIC OF BOB MARLEY, JIMMY DURANTE, SUKAY, ENYA, & THOMAS BERGERSEN

GRASSROOTS FILMS PRESENTS "THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE" CLIFFORD AZIZE, JEFFREY AZIZE, MICHAEL CAMPO, MATTHEW SANCHEZ
DIRECTED BY THOMAS J. BERGERSEN PRODUCED BY CHARLES KINNANE EDITED BY SIMON FUNG MUSIC BY JEFFREY PIASZYNSKI EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS CLIFFORD AZIZE, MICHAEL CAMPO
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MONICA FITZGIBBONS PRODUCED BY MICHAEL CAMPO DIRECTED BY JOSEPH CAMPO PRODUCED BY CHARLES KINNANE GRASSROOTS FILMS
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE relates the experience of two brothers who had a difficult childhood. Jeffrey Azize maintains that his father was not a bad person; he relates how on certain days he would even consider his father his hero. Unfortunately, there were evenings when his father would come home drunk, and this left its mark on the boy. His older brother, Clifford, decides to leave the house and look for a better home for him and for his brother. However, Jeffrey always feels that he has been deprived of something important in his childhood. Although it is difficult for him to express himself, there are moments when he feels there is no hope in life. This is the reason why the two brothers join some friends who have also been through difficult experiences, and together they look up other people who are considered to be living lives with no hope. Their first experience is among the homeless people in New York. Like them, they try to find a sheltered place on the cold nights, and someone with a kind heart who would give them something to eat. After this experience, they go to a home for disabled children in Peru. Here Clifford and Jeffrey meet children who are full of love, in spite of their great suffering. Finally, they decide to visit a community of lepers in Ghana. These experiences help the two brothers realise that these people had hope, although there was a lot of suffering in their lives, and this helps them to overcome their own suffering. Jeffrey often discusses this during his experiences. At the end of the film, he meets his father again, and the father begs his sons to forgive him for all the pain he had inflicted on them because of his addiction to alcohol. After many years, Jeffrey and Clifford eventually come to see the power of hope in the life of the human person.

of gaining weight and thus start cutting down on their food and cause great harm to their health.

Some bad habits may damage our character, examples of which are: lying, swearing, and selfishness. Lying often draws us into a vicious circle of continuous lies, and this causes problems in our relationships with others. Some young people start swearing in order to appear older and 'cool', but they do not realise they are giving others a very poor opinion of themselves, because it is

obvious that they are trying to be someone else. Some young people also start behaving as if they are the centre of the universe, and they soon find themselves abandoned by friends who feel more comfortable in the company of others.

Ultimately, these bad habits move us away from the truth which helps us grow internally. These bad habits cut us off from the people who truly love us and they also make it difficult for us to experience God's great love.

Very often, people whose lives are dominated by these bad habits lose those qualities which make life a great adventure and the greatest gift given to us by God. This does not mean that God has forgotten these people, but they have forgotten how much he loves them, not because of what they do, but because of who they have become when they become aware of God's great love, they have taken the first step to overcoming the bad habits in their lives. Then they can start nourishing that which bears good fruit in their lives – virtue.

Practising the virtues

Our heart is a sacred space, and we cannot leave its doors wide open to anyone and anything. We have to look after it and protect it.

The philosophers of ancient Greece, especially Plato and Aristotle, who lived more than 300 years before Christ, used to have discussions about the

characteristics that make us better people, and thus also happier people. We should all develop what is called a 'philosophy of life', that is, our own way of thinking and reacting to what happens to us. However, in order to develop a philosophy of life, we have to go to the right sources where we discover the values that make

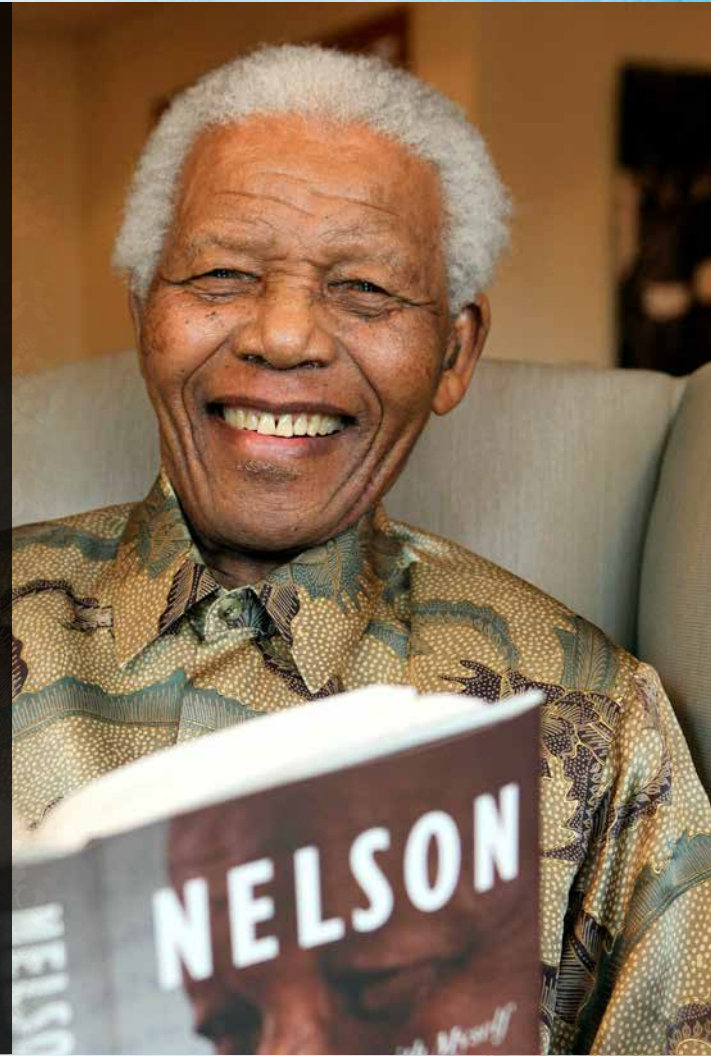
us fully human, and capable of respecting our own dignity and the dignity of others. We have said that bad habits set us on the wrong track in life. Hence, we need to discover the virtues that bring out all that is beautiful within us.

Two books from the Old Testament, are called the Book of



NELSON MANDELA

Nelson Mandela was born in South Africa on the 18 July 1918. He became active in politics because he wanted to contribute to the fight against the discrimination found in his country and in the world, between white and black people – what we call 'apartheid'. This was present in every aspect of society. There were even different buses for white and black people, and they used different bus stops. When Mandela was 44 years old, he was imprisoned for life. He was told he would be freed if he changed his opinion, but he refused to do so because of his sense of justice, his deep love for his country and his people, and his strength of character, which made him give his life for the cause. Even though he was in prison, he was regarded as the leader who would eventually liberate Africa from what was happening, including the great violence that was taking place. In 1990, he was released, after 27 years in prison. The whole world watched this event on television. He became president of the country in 1994, and he was thus now in a position to work tirelessly to remove existing unjust structures, so that the different races could live together in harmony in the country. People like Mandela are not only considered heroes because of what they did for their country, but because they are also role models who can inspire so many other people.



Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs. These two books examine in detail the human virtues that help us discover ourselves and learn to live with others.

This topic has also been discussed by the Doctors of the Church. Among them we find St Thomas Aquinas who spoke of the virtues of faith, hope and charity, which help us build a relationship with God. However, before he discussed these virtues, he mentioned others virtues needed by human beings. He called these the 'cardinal' virtues. The word 'cardinal' is derived from Latin and it means a hinge. Just as a door turns on its hinges when opening and closing, so we need these virtues

which help us recognise what is essential in order to grow. These virtues are the basis of our humanity. It is on this foundation that we develop as human persons.

THE CARDINAL VIRTUES

Prudence is the practical wisdom of life, which is different from the wisdom gained from books. We need the wisdom of life in the decisions and choices we make, in the way we try to understand life.

Justice is the quality that makes us sensitive to others and to their needs. When this quality is lacking, we have no respect for what belongs to others. And this leads to chaos.

Fortitude can also be called courage. It is the quality we need in order to face life. It is the opposite of fear. A person who is afraid will not do what he knows to be right because he might make a mistake. Fortitude or courage is the virtue that gives us a strong character, makes us what we believe and capable of standing up to what is wrong.

Temperance is the virtue that helps us control any exaggerations. We cannot go to extremes, and ignore the 'middle road'. If we can control ourselves, we are discreet, knowing when to speak, and when to keep silent. When we can control ourselves, we are not led by circumstances.

My inner journey



Look it up!

Have you ever heard of St Teresa of Avila or Thomas Merton. These were two very important people in the Church. Look up some information about them, and see what you can learn from their lives.





Pray



In the history of the Church, we meet many people who have made this inner journey. One of them is St Francis of Assisi. He lived a life of enjoyment and luxury before he discovered that it was only God who could fill the void within him. This was the beginning of his inner journey, and we still have many writings which were the result of his adventure. One of his prayers asks God precisely to make us better people and thus help us progress on our life journey:

Lord, make me an instrument
of your peace.
Where there is hatred,
let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sadness, joy...
For it is in giving
that we receive.
It is in pardoning
that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying
that we are born
to Eternal Life.

St Teresa of Avila, a Spanish saint who lived in the sixteenth century, compared the human soul to a castle with seven rooms, one after the other. She compares the desire for spiritual growth to the desire to leave the room we inhabit, and move to the next room. In simple words, the rooms symbolise the different steps we all must take in order to discover ourselves. This takes place slowly and requires infinite patience. Sometimes we do not realise that we must be capable of being in touch with ourselves before we can meet others and, ultimately, meet

God. Throughout this journey, we become mature people, with strong characters. And it is our humanity that shines out in a special way.

There is a whole world within us waiting to be explored. We cannot be afraid. We cannot be frightened of facing the truth within our hearts. If we are afraid of discovering ourselves, we may develop what Thomas Merton called 'the false self'. However, it is important for us to create a space where 'the true self' can emerge. Only thus can we find

out who we truly are; and only thus can we discover who other people are. It is also in this way that we can encounter God in our lives. And we realise that God has created something beautiful within us which is waiting to be discovered and developed so that we become a new creation, capable of bringing about a change in the world.

God extends this invitation to all of us. He is asking us not to abandon this adventure, but to embrace it and by doing so we live our life to the full.

REVIEW

A KEYWORDS

Briefly explain the following terms:

- ▶ Attitudes
- ▶ Bad habit
- ▶ Virtue

B MAIN IDEAS

Write a paragraph about the following:

- ▶ Bad habits diminish my freedom.
- ▶ The decisions in my life.
- ▶ Is it right for me to say: 'My life is mine, and thus it is up to me to decide'?

C STOP AND THINK

Using what you have learnt in this chapter, answer the following:

- ▶ It is easy to acquire a bad habit. What can you do so that this does not remain a part of your life?
- ▶ What do you understand by a spiritual life? Does this correspond with your spiritual life?

D FAMILY DISCUSSION

Discuss the following with members of the family:

- ▶ How can we live the virtues in modern life?



At a crossroads



The World within me is a journey of exploration of the small or big world that each of us carries within. This book studies the journey of life and the existence of man, who goes through different experiences, some of them tough, which may either help him to mature or to blunder. Our most basic choices are the foundation on which we build our life and they also form our personal character. This connection can offer our faith a different perspective of what is happening. Faith changes our vision and perception of life. Although the ugliness of life is not entirely removed, life continues to be beautiful and it gives us the motivation to live it to the full.

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