

THE LIFE AND MISSION OF JESUS

There are two predominant interconnected themes in this strand, they are:

- a) Love/right relationships (see also narrative on Triune God)
- b) Jesus' life, his mission and therefore the mission of the Church is to fully realise the Kingdom/Reign of God

These themes intersect when we teach that God wants right relationships and that right relationships enable the Kingdom/Reign of God to come about.

The Kingdom of God is not a place and the Reign of God doesn't refer to a particular rule over a particular place at a particular time, it is a way of being in the world, a way of being in right relationships with all. This particular way of being may be expressed in Scripture as either Kingdom or Reign of God.

Jesus showed by his life, death and resurrection how to be in right relationship with God, and with all creation including people. The Kingdom/Reign of God, is the heart of Christianity because it is the heart of Jesus' teaching and actions, it was/is his mission to bring about God's Kingdom/Reign.

Love/right relationships

Catholics believe that all humanity is created in the image of God and therefore all people have an innate dignity, every person is important, every person is loved by God. Humanity finds it hard to imagine or even conceive of God's love. Catholics look to the perfect, complete example of God's love, Jesus, God's son. Jesus was a first century Palestinian Jew, a Nazarene from the province of Galilee whose life and mission was to help people know something about God and about right relationships so that the Kingdom/Reign of God is animated in the world now. It is very hard to grasp the depth of love between God and Jesus, and the love that God has for all humanity. Other than the stories about Jesus' life and his teaching, Christians can only turn to personal life experiences in order to understand something of the amazing love of God.

Jesus, who lived in a particular historical, social, political and religious context, is central to the Christian's search for meaning and identity. Christians know through Scripture that Jesus belonged to a family. Jesus' family background was that of a craftsman, possibly working in wood and stone. Palestine was a small stretch of land approximately 60kms wide and 400kms long. It was a desirable piece of land politically, geographically and economically and had been invaded numerous times. At the time of Jesus, it was under Roman control. In Jesus' world, Jerusalem was the centre of the Jewish world. It was the place of government as well as pilgrimage (Passover, Pentecost & Tabernacles).

The Gospel stories do not set out to provide a detailed biography of Jesus' life because their central focus is on the message of Jesus for their particular audience, but nevertheless, we can discern that Mary was an important person in the earthly life of Jesus and that she loved and supported him. Catholics also look to Mary as an example of unconditional love because she believed and trusted in God. She showed this by loving her son, Jesus, and by allowing God to work through her. Mary is a role model for all, a woman of faith who showed an openness to God. It is especially in families that people get some idea of unconditional love, of loving and being loved in return.

St Paul is another example of a faithful follower of Jesus who actively carried on the mission by doing what he did best, he was a great orator, who worked tirelessly and travelled far and wide to spread the news about Jesus. He was an encourager, a supporter and a prayerful man as evidenced in his letters to early Church communities.

Jesus' Mission and the Kingdom/Reign of God

Jesus' life, his mission and therefore the mission of the Church is to fully realise the Kingdom/Reign of God

Jesus

Catholics believe that God is present throughout eternity, past, present and future, till the end of time. They recognise the presence of God in the stories of the Hebrew people to whom God promised a Messiah (the promised one). Catholics believe that God kept God's promise because Jesus entered human history: Jesus is God expressed in the world and God's presence continues to be expressed today through the Holy Spirit, the spirit of the love between Father and Son, recognised as the Holy Spirit, third person of the Trinity by the Catholic Church. If Christians want to understand Jesus, then they need to recognise not only his humanity but also his divinity. Catholics believe Jesus is fully human and divine and shares his Spirit with all, this Spirit, is active in the Church and the world today. Catholics also believe that Jesus will return at the end of time. So Jesus is God past, present and future.

Jesus was not the type of Messiah the Hebrews expected. The history of the Hebrew people is complex, filled with stories about invasions and inter-tribal fighting. They wanted a warrior-like Messiah to save them from oppression. The Jews consider themselves God's chosen people, a relationship grounded in covenant, a history of promise and fulfilment. Against this backdrop Jesus entered the world, revealing who God is, and how God wants humanity to live, this is his mission. He entered not as a warrior Messiah but a Messiah in a new way.

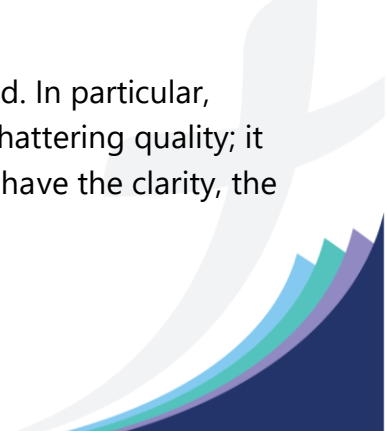
The Gospel texts indicate that it is likely Jesus had a good education in the Jewish faith and Hebrew Scriptures, therefore he would have known the kind of Messiah the Jews expected. Yet he carried out his mission, a mission greater than merely defeating the enemies of the Hebrew people, a mission paid for with his death. Jesus' words and actions are described in the Gospels in different ways depending on the purpose of the author, and the audience. Like any piece of writing, the context of the time must be considered in order to fully understand the message of the text. Some stories may not appear in all Gospels; some may be very different or totally omitted. This does not detract from understanding Jesus, rather it adds to the rich tapestry that surrounds his life, death and resurrection. Together with other texts in the New Testament, the truth about Jesus and his mission is clear, it is about relationships, it is about the Kingdom/Reign of God, and it calls all baptised in his name to carry on this mission. Jesus Christ's message of salvation is one of conversion, hope, liberation and universal love. He was considered a teacher, prophet, miracle worker, healer, advocate for women, defender of the poor & oppressed and much more.

Jesus' Community: the mission continues

After Jesus' death and resurrection people gathered in communities to remember him and tell the story of his compassion and love. The understanding of Jesus as Messiah and, in particular the understanding of his resurrection, developed slowly over time. If Christians look at the New Testament texts they may discern that these texts, written post resurrection, indicate a developing understanding of this significant event.

The Holy Spirit, the gift of Jesus, inspires and renews the Church community to live as Jesus did. Therefore, God is present today in the world, God's Kingdom/Reign is already here but not fully realised. This is the mission of the Church and its community of believers, who share the mission of Jesus to bring about the Kingdom/Reign of God.

The mission of the Church is Jesus' mission to direct the searcher toward the deep well of spiritual longing – the Kingdom of God. In particular, Christians are called to serve the poor by reaching out, by listening with the heart. Jesus' original message has lost much of its shattering quality; it has been commandeered by humanity, sometimes with a thirst for earthly power, so that the message of Jesus does not always have the clarity, the brutality it needs to speak out against iniquities.



Jesus Christ lived and proclaimed the values of the Kingdom/Reign of God. He challenges all to discipleship. Those baptised in Christ, those who belong to his community are obliged to proclaim in word and deed Jesus' message of conversion, hope, liberation and universal love. It is not an optional extra of being a follower, it is the heart and soul of Christianity.

