

# The Church 40 years on

## No. 2

Life can be a waiting room  
or a journey in the light

The People of God

### Chapter Two

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church  
Second Vatican Council, 1965

A Small Group Reflection

#### Inside:

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2. Part One - Our life story
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  - Characteristics of the People of God
  - A priestly people

### How to use these reflections

**Contents:** The guide provides texts for reflection and brief supplements on the texts. At the end, there are questions suggested for reflection and sharing.

**Method:** There is no fixed method. Groups that meet regularly may use their established ways of presenting the materials, reflection and sharing. For others, it is suggested that a facilitator leads the reflection and sharing.

One suggestion takes the following format: opening prayer (hymn?), introduce the theme (facilitator), read the texts, take a pause for reflection, share experiences and understanding, summary of the sharing, and closing prayer.

**[Note:** The texts are not easy to read. Have the reader(s) prepare. After each text, pause, and give time for the others to read the texts quietly on their own. The reflection questions provided are only suggestions – do not be limited by them].

**Comment:** It is good to have available the document itself (Lumen Gentium), and a Bible.

**Caution:** This is the second of a series of eight reflections on the Church. Try to stay focused on the aspects of Church discussed in each chapter.

Life can be a waiting room or a  
journey in the light.

## The People of God

Lumen Gentium Chapter II

Part One  
(20 minutes)

### A. Our life story

While waiting for the bus to go to the childcare centre suddenly little Johnny ran out onto the street while his mother was straightening Molly's socks. A stranger ran out and pulled him back just in time. However, the pull was so strong and sudden that Johnny fell over the pavement and cut his knee rather badly. He was screaming. Janice, the frantic mother was wondering what to do when someone told her there was a clinic just in the next block. She went over there with her children and found the waiting room full of people. The nurse gave first aid to Johnny and told them to wait their turn for further examination. Janice had no choice but to call her office to say she would be in late and wait. The people were typical of any doctor's clinic waiting room. The others waiting glance sympathetically at the children, look away so that there is no eye contact with the adults and generally carry on with their own pre-occupations. Janice realized she had not thanked the man who saved her Johnny from a much worse fate but now she was here and couldn't leave to look for him. Molly was getting very restless and Johnny was still crying but no one seemed to notice anyway.

Questions for reflection

1. Have you noticed the atmosphere in a doctor's waiting room? How is it different from the atmosphere in a lift full of people in an apartment block?

2. What is different about a congregation at Eucharist?
3. What is your experience of being at Mass? Whom do you notice or greet? Who is ignored or pushed aside?

Supplement

- We are called the Body of Christ and yet we are most often only aware of our own family and a few friends.
- 'We are one in the bond of love' (we like to sing this song) but we hardly notice the people around us never mind praying with and for them.
- In the Eucharist we are celebrating the sacrament of our unity and reconciliation but our way of being present may be individualistic and unfriendly.
- We are a people, saved by God, made holy & whole and yet we remain unresponsive to the prayers and songs of the Mass.

Part Two  
(45 minutes)

### B. What Scripture teaches

*Work in pairs. Read at least two texts and reflect on the question:*

**What characteristics of the People of God do you find in the texts? Share your reflections with the whole group.**

1. Revelation 7:9-10
2. 1 Peter 3:9-10
3. Titus 2:11-14
4. Acts 10:34-35

Supplement

- People from every nation & tribe are welcome & included.
- We have been chosen by God and made into a holy people
- Saved and purified in order to become a people of God
- All people of good will belong in some way to the People of God

### C. What the Church teaches:

#### **Characteristics of the People of God**

*(Taken from the Catechism of the Catholic Church)*

- Read the following paragraph individually and then in the whole group aloud.
- Ask the group to explain what each point means and try to express it in your own words.
- List the most important words as a summary of the features of the "People of God".

**782** The people of God is marked by characteristics that clearly distinguish it from all other religious, ethnic, political or cultural groups found in history.

- It is the People **of God**: God is not the property of any one people, But he acquired a people for himself from those who previously were not a people: "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation"

- One becomes a **member** of this people not by a physical birth, but by being "born anew" a birth "of water and the Spirit", that is by faith in Christ, and Baptism.

- This People has for its head Jesus the Christ, (the anointed, the Messiah). Because the same anointing, the Holy Spirit, flows from the head into the body, this is "the messianic people".

- The **status** of this people is that of the dignity and freedom of the sons & daughters of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in a temple."

- "Its **law** is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us." This is the "new" law of the Holy Spirit.

- Its **mission** is to be salt of the earth and light of the world. This people is "a most sure seed of unity, hope, and salvation for the whole human race."

- Its **destiny**, finally, "is the Kingdom of God which has been begun by God himself on earth and which must be further extended until it has been brought to perfection by him at the end of time." *Lumen Gentium* 9.2

Conclusion

#### **Question for reflection**

What can we do to improve our way of belonging to this wonderful People of God? Look at the three areas of service, community and worship.

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#### HOME WORK

For you to read at home - these texts will be useful for your reflections in April and May.

#### **Sharers in the Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly Mission of Jesus Christ**

*Taken from "The vocation and the mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world" John Paul II, Vatican, 1988.*

#### **A threefold mission**

14.3 In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, at the beginning of my pastoral ministry, my aim was to emphasize forcefully the priestly, prophetic and kingly dignity of the entire people of God in the following words: " He who was born of the Virgin Mary, the carpenter's Son - as he was thought to be – Son of the living God (confessed by Peter), has come to make us a 'kingdom of priests'. The Second Vatican Council has reminded us of the mystery of this power and of the fact that the mission of Christ – Priest, Prophet-Teacher and King – continues in the Church. Everyone, the whole People of God, shares in this threefold mission". (*Pope John Paul II first homily as Pope*)

Here in summary form are the essentials of this teaching.

#### **Priestly people a living sacrifice of praise**

14.5 The lay faithful shares in the *priestly mission*, for which Jesus offered himself on the cross and continued to be offered in the

celebration of the Eucharist for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity. Incorporated in Jesus Christ, the baptized are united to him and his sacrifice in the offering they make of themselves and their daily activities (cf. *Romans* 12: 1,2). Speaking of the lay faithful the Council says: "For their work, prayers and apostolic endeavours, their ordinary married and family life, their daily labour, their mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life if patiently borne – all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (cf 1 *Pt* 2: 5). During the celebration of the Eucharist these sacrifices are most lovingly offered to the Father along with the Lord's body. Thus worshippers whose every deed is holy, the lay faithful consecrate the world itself to God. (*Lumen Gentium* paragraph 34)

### **Priestly people and the sacraments**

14.9 The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist. It is a participation given to each member of the lay faithful *individually*, in as much as each is one of the *many* who form the *one Body* of the Lord: in fact, Jesus showers his gifts upon the Church which is his Body and Spouse. In such a way individuals are sharers of the three-fold mission of Christ in virtue of their being member of the Church, as St Peter clearly teaches, when he defines the baptized as a " chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people " (1 *Pt* 2:9). Precisely because it derives from Church communion, the sharing of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ requires that it be lived and realized *in communion* and *for the increase of communion itself*. St Augustine writes: "As we call everyone 'Christians' in virtue of a mystical anointing, so we call everyone 'priests' because all are members of only one priesthood." (*St Augustine "City of God"*)

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