

'It may bear fruit next year'

God waits patiently for change in our lives

Preparation: Those conducting the meeting arrive first ahead of the others to set everything up and welcome the members of the group. To lead the meeting, foresee a bible, a basket of various fruits (or a bouquet of pretty flowers) and by the side, the seeds of the fruits (or flowers).

Welcome setting and Opening Hymn:

After some customary words of welcome, we begin with a hymn in line with the theme of the day. Then, we give a brief report on *what has been applied in accordance with resolutions taken at the end of the preceding meeting*. Let us think of highlighting how these decisions have enabled change (even a little) in our reality and in our hearts!

Prayer: Preferably made by those conducting the meeting according to their style and personality, bearing in mind the previous sharing on commitments achieved. If inspiration is lacking, here is the first prayer of the 3rd Sunday of Lent: *God our Father, in your infinite love and goodness you have shown us that prayer, fasting and almsgiving are remedies for sin: accept the humble admission of our guilt, and when our conscience weights us down let your unfailing mercy raise us up. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.*

1- Let us examine our lives:

- *What do you feel when seeing the symbols set out on the table? ?*
- *How have these fruits (flowers) grown and become so pretty?*
- *Can we change the world without 'paying the price' (to others, to self and to God?)*

2- Sung Acclamation of the Word of God (in the line of the Gospel, which demands from us to change our lives). **Gospel Reading: Lk 13: 1-9.** After an initial reading and a few minutes of silence, the passage is re-read but by a different reader.

Deepen the meaning of the reading in our own circumstances! In referring to the victims of Pilate (killed while carrying out a religious act), and to the casualties of a tower under construction (killed at work), Jesus is not inviting us to contemplate a sudden death, but to realise the importance of each act of our present lives. The Chosen People are compared to a barren tree that for years has produced nothing: anyone other than God would have cut it down! However, if he is patient, it is in order to achieve his plan along with us!

- *If someone commits in favour of justice, he 'creates problems for himself'. Is this Jesus' point of view? He speaks of a condition - 'unless' (v.5): Which?*
- *We are the Church, the new Chosen People; if we do not produce the fruits of justice what does our Christian commitment mean in our surroundings?*
- *Since coming to Bible study, in what way do you feel compelled to a conversion-change?*

Repeat the Acclamation Song for the Word of God.

3- Prayer: For three thousand years, Psalm 1 gives heart to those who wish to be fruitful in the eyes of the Lord. Before seeking what we can do, it would be good to pray to feel the happiness in doing God's will.

- a- Happy the man who never follows the advice of the wicked, or loiters on the way that sinners take, or sits about with scoffers,
- b- but finds his pleasure in the Law of Yahweh, and murmurs his law day and night.
- a- He is like a tree that is planted by water streams, yielding its fruit in season, its leaves never fading;
- b- It is nothing like this with the wicked, nothing like this! No, these are like chaff blown away by the wind.
- a- The wicked will not stand firm when Judgement comes, nor sinners when the virtuous assemble.
- b- For Yahweh takes care of the way the virtuous go, but the way of the wicked is doomed.

4- Putting the Word of God into practice.

The most frequent excuse for not bearing fruit is 'the means were lacking', or again, 'it is very complicated in this country.' In the Gospel, Jesus asserts that change can only come from within, from the nature of the tree itself, which was created to produce:

- *What changes do we need to propose to our community? What fruit is God waiting for me to produce (personally)? ?*
- *Between doing EVERYTHING and NOTHING, we can do SOMETHING.*

Prepare the next meeting: place, date, leaders...

Before leaving, the fruits (flowers) and seeds may be shared out in a friendly, happy spirit.

Final Hymn

MOVING AHEAD

Some more ideas

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">a- Gather some friends for a cup of tea to discuss 'If Christians gave the example, our message would have more credibility.'b- Invite your diocesan prison chaplains to share on their ministry in Algerian prisons.c- Read the following passage in group and try to draw some conclusions... |
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Parable: THE FLOATING CITY OF MERCY ¹

Once upon a time, a group of very religious and charitable minded people made up of Bishops, Priests, Religious, Brothers and Sisters, along with very devoted laypeople - doctors, teachers, social workers - formed a society.

Their aim was to instruct people in the Catholic faith, good morals and upright living, to help suffering and neglected humanity, the children, the orphans, the sick, the aged, the derelicts of our world.

In their great desire to help others and carry out good and relevant services and ministries, they bought a passenger ship. Part of the ship was formed into a large and beautiful church where people were taught the Word of God and where most inspiring religious services were conducted.

Another part of the ship was changed into a very good school where poor children were given a good education.

Still another part of the huge liner was reshaped into a modern hospital. There, hundreds of poor patients were lovingly tended. Elsewhere in the ship, they built a well-provided orphanage. There anyone could see crowds of orphans being pampered with love and care. Other parts of the ship were re-modelled to serve as a home for the aged, a crèche, a rehabilitation centre for alcoholics and drug addicts and other many charitable, educational and social works. Truly, that mighty liner had become a "Floating City of Mercy". Working in the ship there were large numbers of zealous priests, dedicated Sisters and Brothers, nurses, teachers and social workers. Their dedication and devotedness was most admirable!

One day, the Floating City of Mercy sprang a leak. The sea water slowly began flooding the hold of the ship. A lonely visitor to the ship happened to detect the leak and immediately raised the alarm.

He went to the doctors and sisters and said: "Doctors, Sisters, there is a leak in the ship. Hurry up! Do something about it!" But the doctors and the sisters replied: "We are doctors, we are Sisters, our duty is to care for the patients, not to engage in ship-repairing work." And they went on looking after the sick with single-minded dedication.

Then, our man ran to the Religious and teachers. He said: "Reverend Mothers, dear teachers, the boat is leaking. Please, do something. It's urgent! But they raised their eyes and mumbled: "Oh no! Our vocation is to teach poor children and give them the best available education. God never called us to do mechanical works!"

Finally, in despair our man ran to the priests and to the Church authorities. He cried out: Listen! The ship is leaking. We are sinking! Stop all our preaching and ministries! Run to the hold and repair the leak! It's an emergency! Hurry up!

"Not at all!" the Church authorities replied, "Priests are supposed to do the work for which they were ordained. They cannot neglect their priestly ministries and vocation! Let the laypeople see to it!" And so, in the Floating City of Mercy, the priests and Religious, Brothers and Sisters, doctors and social workers beautifully and most inspiringly went on with great dedication doing the work their vocation called them to do. Everything looked fine and peaceful. Only a few days later, the ship with all its pupils, patients, orphans, and old people sank to the bottom of the sea along with their dedicated band of priests, Sisters, Brothers, doctors, teachers and other highly motivated helpers.

¹ Text from Manuel for JPIC Promoters, Rome, 1997, pp. 150 -152

Ideas Helpful for Discussion

The story was prepared to initiate a discussion on the relevance of the ministries and works of the Church in our world today. We wanted to stress the point that mere "spiritual and charitable" works will not suffice in the circumstances we live in at this moment. We need to stress both:

PROMOTION OF FAITH ~ PROMOTION OF JUSTICE.

- ◆ The liner represents the world, and world structures.
- ◆ The society of religious and charitable people stands for the Church.
- ◆ The leak and the sinking of the ship represent the crumbling down of the world socio-political and economical structures. The world is sinking.
- ◆ The priestly ministries, the teaching, hospital work and charitable deeds represent the services the Church renders to the world.
- ◆ The urgent repair work needed to save the ship stands for the promotion of justice in our world.
- ◆ The works the Church did and does are excellent, but they have to be seen and judged in the context of today's global situation. In current circumstances, we could question their relevance and priority values.
- ◆ Some good works could be suspended for a time, or combined with repair works - "promotion of justice".
- ◆ All the members of the Church - the clergy and Religious included - are citizens of the world. They have inescapable social, civic and political obligations to make our society a better and a more just one.
- ◆ The visitor to the ship stands for the social activists and those who try to raise people's awareness.

QUESTIONS

In the context of today's global crisis discuss the following:

1. How relevant are the ministries and works of the Church? What should be done?
2. Can "promotion of faith" be combined with "promotion of justice"? How? Are they to be viewed as two different aims? Why? Are they reciprocal? How?
3. How can the members of the Church become aware of their social responsibilities?