



Module 2 – Week 1 – The Four Truths – 19 July 2022

Archbishop Porteous started with an overview of this second module by summarising it with one word – ‘identity’. In comparison to the first module, which focussed on ‘encounter’, he will be looking more deeply at the identity in terms of being Catholics, as Christians and as believers. This will be explored in a variety of ways over the next few weeks.

To begin exploring this, Archbishop Porteous referred to Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation to young people in 2019 called ‘Christus Vivit’ (‘Christ Lives’) after a synod in Rome talking about the role of young people in the Church. In the middle of the document, he presents four very important truths for young people. He will be looking at the four truths over the next four weeks.

“God loves you, Christ saves you, He is alive, The Spirit gives life”

- Pope Francis to Young People

Tonight, the focus was on the first truth – God loves you. It is a commonly known phrase, something that can be passed over and the words can run over one without really absorbing the meaning of this phrase. While it is something that is familiar and used commonly, it is a profound revelation about the nature of God and the nature of our relationship with God – it is grounded in love.

To illustrate this, in the Old Testament during Moses’ encounter with God with the burning bush, Moses kept asking God who He was. Moses had no clear sense of who God really was. This issue continued for Moses for a while after the exodus as they travelled through the Arabian Peninsula, until they finally settled at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses asks the question once again in Exodus 33:18 *“I pray you, show me your glory.”* So, Moses is still trying to get a sense of who God is. He asks God to reveal Himself (his glory) to Moses. And God agrees and says He will pass before him. God’s glory is such that one cannot behold His glory. He advised Moses to stay behind the cleft of a rock and said He will pass and put His hand across Moses as He passes by as the intensity of God’s glory is too intense and too great for Moses to see Him. Moses has this moment of God revealing His glory even if God was still hidden from him face to face.

In the following chapter Exodus 34:6, it’s almost as though God needs Moses to understand who He is. He wants him to understand His character and His nature. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, *“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands forgiving injury, transgression and sin, a God of steadfast love.”* That is a very significant moment of revelation – understand Me as a God of steadfast love.

In the New Testament, this can be explored more fully in the teachings of Jesus Himself. Just taking up the word steadfast for a moment, one thing that is important is that God’s love is constant – it doesn’t change. Just like the sun, shining. In fact, that image of the sun shining is something that Jesus Himself takes up.

In St Matthew's gospel 5:43 when Jesus talks about the love of God for humanity *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'* It is typical, to separate people depending on whether they are on our side or not. There is a tendency to create division on whether someone is within our favour or outside our favour. Jesus says, *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun shine on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust."* God loves all constantly and steadily. God doesn't have people who are outside his favour (although people can put themselves outside of His favour). God's love is constant like the sun shining or the rain falling. God doesn't pull back his love when someone doesn't treat him right. God is not like that. This contrasts with how human beings are. When one is offended by another, there is a tendency to withdraw one's love from that person. God's love is steadfast and constant, and this is how all should love. God's love never changes, it is constant, it never changes as God never changes.

Another concept about God's love is that His love is personal. This is something that Archbishop Porteous had difficulty understanding for many years. He easily believed that God loves the world and the whole of humanity but how can God's love be special, unique and particular just for himself? Is God's love for one so personal and individual that somehow this manages to engage with each person in a very particular way? The answer is yes. God's love for each person is individual and personal. God engages with each person in an individual way.

In St Matthew's gospel chapter 11:28 *"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* This is a personal invitation and personal calling.

The image that has meant a lot to Archbishop Porteous is the image of the Sacred Heart with the fire around Jesus' heart with his arms stretched and wide open. Jesus made himself completely and totally open. The words that were said to St Margaret Mary *"Behold this heart that loves humanity so much"*. It is a powerful image. This heart that was pierced on Calvary, this heart has a fire of love for each person individually. *"Come to me because I love you and I want to embrace you, Jesus is waiting to receive us. I love you personally and individually but I need you to come to Me to give you that love so I can let you bask in the warmth of my love for you. Come to Me especially when you burdened and weighed down. Let me show you the love that I have for you."*

The gospels of St John constantly speaks about the love of God. One passage in particular is in 1 John 4:10, *In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation of our sins.* In other words, when one talks about love, don't look at it from how one loves but rather how God loves us. Just discover and appreciate more fully how much God loves everyone. The more one discovers this love, it becomes an extraordinary source of life, which will make one want to love others. One loves others because one was first loved by God.

Then the recorded testimony of Therese Nichols was played. Therese shared how she has always felt the constant and deep love of God for her. She recounts a time when she was living in Italy and attended a weekend art retreat in Naples, not realising the whole retreat was in the Italian language, of which she did not know.

She could look at the art but didn't understand anything about the art. The retreat ended with Mass and a lady in the church went up to her and told her that the gospel was the parable of the Lost Sheep. She then started to wonder about being the one lost sheep that God left the other ninety-nine for. She often wondered who that one sheep was and she always thought that it was someone who was a great sinner, like the drug addict, or the prostitute or the leper. She felt, given her constant faith that she was part of the ninety-nine sheep, although she always wanted to be that one sheep that God would personally go after. Then to her amazement, the priest decided to deliver his ten-minute homily entirely in English, looking at her and giving her a personalised homily despite the other two hundred Italians who were also in attendance at the Mass who would not have understood English. At this moment, she felt that she was that one sheep that God went to look for and left the other two hundred Italians for showing her his deep and constant love for her. God goes after each one of us personally whether we are a great sinner or not and His love is constant and always there. It is up to each one of us to take the blindfold from our eyes to see His love in the detail of our everyday life.