
LET US DREAM

The Path to a Better Future



Pope Francis presides over the Way of the Cross in an empty St. Peter's Square, April 2020
(Photo credit: © Vatican Media)

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Foreword

Welcome to this work of the Bishops Conference of England and Wales Spirituality Committee inspired by Pope Francis' *Let us dream. The path to a better future.*

In the days after Easter, the Church invites us to follow the Church on her journey as she emerges from the empty tomb in the light of the resurrection and from the upper room prompted by the Holy Spirit. It is a hope-filled story as we see the Church continue to grow as she responds to the Holy Spirit and builds up the different fledgling communities. We know, too, of course, that the life in the early Church was not without a crisis or two! Indeed, it was these crises as much as anything else that helped to shape its present and future.

In *Let us Dream*, Pope Francis offers a deeply personal and passionate reflection on the Covid crises in his own life and insightful observations on the present Covid crisis as he looks and sees what is going on around the world. His conclusion is that Covid, as well as bringing untold suffering, has brought blessing in the present and can shape our future for the better. But, he says, for this to happen, "We have to see clearly, choose well and act right" p7.

I hope that as we make this journey together from Easter to Pentecost the insights of Pope Francis will enable us to begin 'to see, clearly, choose well, act right' as we look to rebuild our lives and renew the Church post Covid.

+Ralph Heskett C.Ss.R.

Introduction

“Let us Dream” is a reflection by Pope Francis offering a path to a better future for the world.

Many people remember the prayer at St Peter’s in the early days of the pandemic. Many probably hoped that a miracle would occur, and the pandemic be stopped in its tracks. It was not – and it is likely that Pope Francis did not expect that it would be. But, sometimes, miracles are slower in unfolding. Had people said what they hoped for in March 2020, it would have been an end to the disease. In the year since, people have been challenged and blessed. They have asked – and been asked – hard questions. They have seen dedicated and unstinting service from some – and greed and corrupt behaviour in others. They have seen – or heard of – people dying with hospital staff taking the place of families and families unable to grieve in ways that help to start the healing process of bereavement.

Through all of this and more, Pope Francis has contemplated – looking and listening to what is happening all around the world – reflecting and discerning what is at work – and exploring what action would be needed to create a better future for humanity and the planet we call home.

As vaccination is beginning to be made available throughout the world, this is a timely moment to review where we have been – to identify where we are – and to dare to dream of what might to come.

In this, we are in good company. This year has been designated a Year of St Joseph – a carpenter, husband and father who was also a dreamer. Not only did he dream but he recognised in at least four of them, guidance from God about how he was to act in particularly difficult situations.

Under his patronage – Let us also dream.

As he had done with Mary, God revealed his saving plan to Joseph. He did so by using dreams, which in the Bible and among all ancient peoples, were considered a way for him to make his will known.

Patris Corde#3

How to use this resource

The format of each session is simple

- Welcome and, if appropriate, introductions.
- Opening Psalm
- Small group conversations around the reading and questions. (**Note:** you do not need to use them all - select according the time available and nature of the group.)
- Plenary - opportunity to share significant points that came up in groups. As the suggestions progress, groups might explore what threads are beginning to emerge from the conversations.
- Closing Psalm

As a Reading Group

People may welcome the opportunity to reflect together during the transition back to a more normal way of living. Groups who have been meeting throughout the pandemic to organise and deal with essential practicalities may value time now "to see" - "to choose" and "to act".

The format would work well using Zoom, Teams or a similar online tool but, with any necessary precautions in place, in face-to-face groups.

Praying the psalms in a group.

- Antiphonally - praying in two parts, alternating the verses, This can be hard to pray together online - the small time lags make the prayer feel less united. A suggestion is to have two readers with everyone else on mute but joining in with one or other of them. Remember to pray it slowly - with short pauses at the end of each line.
- *Lectio Divina* - Read the psalm and then invite members of the group to share a word or phrase that has struck them. Depending on time, there could be an invitation to say why they seemed particularly significant at that time.
- The psalm is simply prayed by one reader - read slowly so that people have time to reflect on the words.

Individually

The four sessions be used as the basis of a day or weekend retreat-at-home or spread over four weeks.

Session 1 – The Prologue

(*Let us Dream*, Pages 1-7)

To enter into crisis is to be sifted. Your categories and ways of thinking get shaken up; your priorities and lifestyles are challenged. You cross a threshold, either by your own choice or by necessity, because there are crises. Like the one we're going through, that you can't avoid.

The question is whether you're going to come through this crisis and if so, how. The basic role of a crisis is that you don't come out of it the same. If you get through it, you come out better or worse, but never the same. (p1)

Opening Psalm – 45/46

God is for us and refuge and strength,
a helper close at hand, in time of distress:
so we shall not fear though the earth should rock,
though the mountains fall into the depths of the sea,
even though its waters rage and foam,
even though the mountains be shaken by its waves.

The Lord of hosts is with us:
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

The waters of a river give joy to God's city,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
God is within, it cannot be shaken;
God will help it at the dawning of the day.
Nations are in tumult, kingdoms are shaken:
he lifts his voice, the earth shrinks away.

The Lord of hosts is with us:
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

Come, consider the works of the Lord
the redoubtable deeds he has done on the earth.
He puts an end to wars over all the earth;
the bow he breaks, the spear he snaps.
[He burns the shields with fire.]
"Be still and know that I am God,
supreme among the nations, supreme on the earth!"

The Lord of hosts is with us:
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

Questions for Reflection

1. Where can you see the difference between '*Functionalism*' and '*the heart*' - both in individuals and the government/institutions?
2. '*Where the danger is, also grows the saving power,*' (p6)
What examples might you give in your own life or in the world?
3. As a result of the Covid19 crisis where do you now see '*restless hearts*'?
4. +Francis uses the parable of the Good Samaritan as a call to change and later says '*God asks us to dare to create something new*' Just how well do you think this is being received?
5. Why can't we just go back to the old normal? What would you say to those that support this view?

Closing Psalm 66/67

O God, be gracious and bless us
and let your face shed its light upon us.
So will your ways be known upon earth
and all nations learn your saving help.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

Let the nations be glad and exult
for you rule the world with justice.
With fairness you rule the peoples,
you guide the nations on earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

The earth has yielded its fruit
for God, our God, has blessed us.
May God still give us his blessing
till the ends of the earth revere him.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

For the Next Session

Read Part 1 - A Time to See (pages 11-47)

Session 2 – Part 1: A Time to See

(*Let us Dream*, Pages 11-47)

“Sometimes, when you think globally, you can be paralyzed: there are so many places of apparently ceaseless conflict, there’s so much suffering and need. I find it helps to focus on concrete situations: you see faces looking for life and love in the reality of each person, of each people. You see hope written in the story of every nation, glorious because it’s a story of sacrifice, of daily struggle, of lives broken in self-sacrifice. So rather than overwhelm you, it invites you to ponder and to respond with hope.” (p11)

Opening Psalm – 84/85

O Lord, you once favoured your land
and revived the fortunes of Jacob,
you forgave the guilt of your people
and covered all their sins.
You averted all your rage,
you calmed the heat of your anger.

Revive us now, God, our helper!
Put an end to your grievance against us.
Will you be angry with us for ever,
will your anger never cease?

Will you not restore again our life
that your people may rejoice in you?
Let us see, O Lord, your mercy
and give us your saving help.

I will hear what the Lord God has to say,
a voice that speaks of peace,
peace for his people and his friends
and those who turn to him in their hearts.
His help is near for those who fear him
and his glory will dwell in our land.

Mercy and faithfulness have met;
justice and peace have embraced.
Faithfulness shall spring from the earth
and justice look down from heaven.

The Lord will make us prosper
and our earth shall yield its fruit.
Justice shall march before him
and peace shall follow his steps.

Questions for Reflection

1. Pope Francis writes:

"The crisis has made visible the throwaway culture. The Covid health measures have exposed, for example, how many of our brothers and sisters do not have housing where social distancing is possible; nor clean water to wash." (p.17)

Is this crisis just about Covid or is it about what Covid has uncovered?

2. *"We have to find ways for those who have been cast aside to act, so that they become the agents of a new future. We have to involve people in a common project that doesn't just benefit the small number who govern and make decision. We have to change the way society itself operates in the wake of Covid." (p.18)*

In what ways can you see that +Francis' dream that those people now on the edge of the crisis become the protagonists of social change?

3. *"The sins of the powerful are almost always sins of entitlement, committed by people whose lack of shame and brazen arrogance are stunning. In the Church, this sense of entitlement is the cancer of clericalism, as I call it, that perversion of the vocation to which we priests are called." (p.25)*

How can we recognise 'the cancer of clericalism'? If you have experienced it, how did it manifest?

4. Speaking of his own increasing awareness of the reality of climate change, Pope Francis writes:

"...through many encounters, dialogues, and anecdotes... my eyes were opened. It was like an awakening, In the night you see nothing, but little by little dawn breaks and you see the day. That was my process: serene and calm, through information I gradually became aware of, until I became convinced of the seriousness of the thing." (p.31)

How can you relate to comparing the process of change to 'in the night you see nothing, but little by little dawn breaks and you see day.'?

5. Speaking of "personal Covids - stoppages and disruptions to our lives, Francis says *"In every personal "Covid", so to speak, in every 'stoppage', what is revealed is what needs to change: our lack of internal freedom, the idols we have been serving, the ideologies we have tried to live by, the relationships we have neglected. What is the greatest fruit of a personal Covid? I'd say patience sprinkled with a healthy sense of humour, which allows us to endure and make space for change to happen." (p.36)*

What qualities would you say are the greatest fruits?

6. Pope Francis says:

Of all the institutions, the family has taken the hardest knock of all. It has lost or at least blurred its social identity as the "first society", where the person is formed as a member of something larger, with rights and duties and security. (p.46)

What evidence do you see to support Pope Francis' claim that the family has suffered the hardest knocks of all? How can renewing this be part of a new, wider Nehemiah project (pp45-46)?

Closing Psalm - 129/130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord,
Lord, hear my voice!

O let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleading.

If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt,
Lord, who would survive?

But with you is found forgiveness:
for this we revere you.

My soul is waiting for the Lord,
I count on his word.

My soul is longing for the Lord
more than watchman for daybreak.
(Let the watchman count on daybreak
and Israel on the Lord.)

Because with the Lord there is mercy
and fullness of redemption,
Israel indeed he will redeem
from all its iniquity.

For the Next Session

Read Part 2 - A Time to Choose, (pages 51-94)

Session 3: Part Two: A Time to Choose

(Let us Dream, Pages 51-72)

Between the first step, which is to come close and allow yourself to be struck by what you see, and the third step, which is to act concretely to heal and repair, there is an essential intermediate stage: to discern, and to choose. A time of trial is always a time of distinguishing the path of the good that lead to the future from other paths that lead nowhere or backward. With clarity, we can better choose the first. (p51)

Opening Psalm - 1

Happy indeed is the man
who follows not the counsel of the wicked;
nor lingers in the way of sinners
nor sits in the company of scorners,
but whose delight is the law of the Lord
and who ponders his law day and night.

He is like a tree that is planted
beside the flowing waters,
that yields its fruit in due season
and whose leaves shall never fade;
and all that he does shall prosper.
Not so are the wicked, not so!

For they like winnowed chaff
shall be driven away by the wind.
When the wicked are judged they shall not stand,
nor find room among those who are just;
for the Lord guards the way of the just
but the way of the wicked leads to doom.

Questions for Reflection

1. Pope Francis says, *"A time of trial is always a time of distinguishing the paths of the good that lead to the future from other paths that lead nowhere or backward. (p.51)*

During the pandemic are you aware of "paths" that seem to lead to good? If so what are they?

2. Pope Francis suggests two sets of guidelines to help us choose ...
"...we need not just openness to reality but a robust set of criteria to guide us: knowing we are loved by God, called to be a people in service and solidarity. We need too a healthy capacity for silent reflection, places of refuge from the tyranny of the urgent. Most of all we need prayer, to hear the prompts of the Spirit and cultivate dialogue in a community that can hold us and allow us to dream." (p.51)

Francis suggests these further aids to help us in our growth: the Beatitudes, Catholic Social Teaching, the preferential option for the poor, the common good, universal destination of goods, solidarity, subsidiarity.

Which of the above seem most important to you? Why?

3. Pope Francis makes several comments about truth.
Whoever takes refuge in fundamentalism is afraid of setting out on the road to truth. He already "has" the truth, and deploys it as a defense, so that any questioning of it is interpreted as aggression against his person. (p.55)
I like to think that we do not possess the truth so much as the truth possesses us, constantly attracting us by means of beauty and goodness. (p.56)

Try to describe "truth" in your own quest and spiritual journey.

4. Pope Francis shows a contrast between having a harmful narrow vision (e.g. fundamentalism) and a glimpse of the greatness of God (humility, accepting and rejoicing in God's mercy) using the scriptural figures of Jonah and Zacchaeus. He describes Jonah as an example of an *"isolated conscience"*. (pp.69-76)

How might you describe the difference of attitude between Jonah and Zacchaeus?

5. Pope Francis gives us a new word “contrapositions”, to use in explaining why views may sometimes differ. He says,

One of the effects of conflict is to see as contradictions what are in fact contrapositions, as I like to call them. A contraposition involves two poles in tension, pulling apart from one another: horizon/limit, local/global, whole/part and so on. These are contrapositions because they are opposites that nonetheless interact in a fruitful, creative tension. ... Contradictions on the other hand demand that we choose between right and wrong. (p.79)

What contrapositions have been present in conversations you have had during lockdown?

6. Pope Francis looks at prayerful discussions in groups such as in a synod. When different views seem in tension he uses the word “overflow” to describe a new spiritual awareness which may spring up:

At such moments, the solution to an intractable problem comes in ways that are unexpected and unforeseen, the result of a new and greater creativity released, as it were, from the outside. This is what I mean by “overflow” because it breaks the banks that confined our thinking, and causes to pour forth, as if from an overflowing fountain, the answers that formerly the contraposition didn't let us see.” (p.80)

When have you experienced tension or a situation that seemed to have no solution - and, suddenly, something new and creative has emerged?

Closing Psalm – 102/103

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The Lord works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger for ever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For the Next Session

Read Part 3 - A Time to Act (pages 98-144)

Session 4: Part Three: A Time to Act

(Let us Dream, Pages 98-144)

We must not let the current clarifying moment pass us by. Let it not be said, in years to come, that in response to the coronavirus we failed to act to restore the dignity of our peoples, to recover our memory and to remember our roots. (p99)

Opening Psalm – 33/34

I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
let the humble hear and be glad.

O magnify the Lord with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.

Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.

This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord,
and was saved from every trouble.

The angel of the Lord encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.

O taste and see that the Lord is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.

O fear the Lord, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.

The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?

Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.
Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their cry.
The face of the Lord is against evildoers,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.
When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears,
and rescues them from all their troubles.
The Lord is near to the broken-hearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the Lord rescues them from them all.
He keeps all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.
Evil brings death to the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
The Lord redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

1. Pope Francis has often insisted on the importance of going to the margins, for example on p.119 of *Let Us Dream*, where we read, *"To recover the dignity of the people we need to go to the margins of our societies to meet all those who live there. Hidden there are ways of looking at the world that can give us all a fresh start"*. He adds to this on p.126, saying, *"to embrace the margins is to expand our horizons, for we see more clearly and broadly from the edges of our society"*.

From your own experience and knowledge, what might some of those "hidden ways" be? What are those margins in your locality? Where might there be those life-giving ways in the margins that the Pope is sure we will find?

2. We are looking towards the future this Easter-tide, but probably with some hesitation, because of how bad things have been for so many. But the Pope has, in the same paragraph on p.119, told us that *"we cannot dream of the future while continuing to ignore the lives of practically a third of the world's population rather than seeing them as a resource"*.

In what ways are those lives being ignored? Who are these people, who Francis dubs "social poets" (p.120) and does that phrase appeal to you? How could they be a resource?

3. Pope Francis introduces us to the three "L"s - Land, Lodging and Labour, following the campaigning action of many Popular Movements (p.128 &ff). *"Let us put the regeneration of the earth and universal access to its goods at the heart of our post-Covid future"*; then he proposes, under Lodging, that we *"enable networks of belonging and solidarity"*; and, under Labour, he broadens our *"far too narrow"* understanding of work, particularly to recognise the value of non-earners such as unpaid carers and volunteers.

How might Francis's ideas about Land, Lodging and Labour shape our post-Covid future? How could we advocate for any of these? He speaks of implementing "an ecological conversion", of "organisations acting together beyond boundaries of belief & ethnicity", and then speaks of Universal Basic Income (UBI), even of reducing working hours. How do you and your group think you could respond to these suggestions?

4. "The Church that goes out", as "missionary disciples", has been a major theme of Pope Francis for a long time. He thinks (p.106) that the Church's mistake has been to lose its closeness to the peoples of the earth in service, favouring instead certain dominating elitist ideologies such as clericalism and pharisaism. He calls this *"the time to restore an ethics of fraternity and solidarity ..."* (p.107).

Francis boldly states that "only the face of another is capable of awakening the best of ourselves" which God has given us. When has this happened to you? Is your parish, community or diocese open to such encounters, to dialoguing and the Common Good, resisting individualism, valuing every human life?

5. Pope Francis puts a lot of emphasis on the concept of “a people”; he has, of course, spoken a great deal about *Fraternity*, which, for example, underpinned his historic visit to Iraq.

He thinks that the Covid calamity is a “clarifying moment (p.99).

He makes clear that he does not mean populism, but a living reality, much more than “merely the sum of individuals”. (p.101) He tells us that we could “abandon the self-defeating isolation of individualism” and thus reconnect with the dignity, the “soul” of the people, releasing lots of potentialities (which he calls “overflow”).

How could Christians make this a reality in our time, our context? Is Covid, for you, the “clarifying moment” that Francis suggests it could be?

6. The Pope ends this third section stating that “the central objective of the post-Covid world” is the “restoration of peoples’ dignity”. This is clearly very different from just getting back to a pre-Covid normal. He says it’s not just a dream but could be a reality “through concrete actions” (all p.133).

Is it possible for a country or a society to move forward unless its members agree to embrace positive change through concrete actions? What is that change for you and through what concrete actions might it be embraced? How can you encourage others to share the vision and make it a reality?

Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;

then it was said among the nations,

'The Lord has done great things for them.'

The Lord has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.

May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping,

bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

Esperanza – Hope



When the storm has passed
and the roads are tamed,
and we are the survivors
of a collective shipwreck.

With tearful heart
and our destiny blessed
we will feel joy
simply for being alive.

And we'll give a hug
to the first stranger
and praise our good luck
that we kept a friend.

And then we'll remember
all that we lost
And finally learn
everything we never learned.

And we'll envy no one
for all of us have suffered
and we'll not be idle
but more compassionate.

We'll value more what belongs to all
than what was earned.
We'll be more generous
and much more committed.

We'll understand how fragile
it is to be alive.
We'll sweat empathy
for those still with us and those who are gone.

We'll miss the old man
asking for a buck in the market
whose name we never knew
who was always at your side

And maybe the poor old man
was your God in disguise.
But you never asked his name
because you never had the time

And all will become a miracle
And all will become a legacy.
And we'll respect the life,
the life we have gained.

When the storm passes
I ask you, Lord, in shame
that you return us better,
as your once dreamed us.

Alexis Valdes



God of our hopes and dreams,
the love you offer always exceeds the furthest expression of our human longing,
for you are greater than the human heart.

By the power of your Spirit,
make us dreamers of your dream for ourselves and for our world.
Give us the faith and vision to make that dream a reality.

Direct each thought, effort of our life,
so that the limits of our faults and weaknesses
may not obscure the vision of your glory.
or keep us from the peace you have promised.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen



Credits

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