

## MARKS OF LOVE Weeks 1 and 2

Let's just begin with an opening prayer:

*May today there be peace within.*

*May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.*

*May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.*

*May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you.*

*May you be content knowing you are a child of God.*

*Let this presence settle into your bones,*

*and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.*

*It is there for each and every one of us. Amen.*

I hope many of you have been following at least some of the daily material for our 5 Marks of Love Lent course. Lent is special time when we reflect and study and draw closer to God. Here we're being asked to reflect on our relationship with God in terms of being marked as God's own and as being marked with the 5 Marks of Mission which correspond to the 5 Marks of Love. These 5 Marks of Mission are:

1. to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. [TELL]
2. to teach, baptize and nurture new believers. [TEACH]
3. to respond to human need by loving service. [TEND]
4. to transform unjust structures, to challenge violence of every kind, and to pursue peace and reconciliation. [TRANSFORM]
5. to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. [TREASURE]

These are not only ways in which we serve God and participate in mission, but signs that we have been "marked" by God's love.

So the first week is thinking about which Mark of Mission is closest to our hearts and what Mission is. To do that we need God's guidance we have to Wait on the Lord just as the first disciples were commanded by Jesus to do at the beginning of the Book of Acts:

"On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about." (Ac 1:4 NIV)

Like those men we need the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I'm not going to go through every day's material that was sent out in detail, that would take too long, but let's look at one thing that was a highlight for me.

I only myself joined into the course on Ash Wednesday and it was a very appropriate reflection on how the 5 Marks of Mission corresponded to the 5 wounds of Christ. These wounds are the ways Christ's disciples recognised him:

"Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and

Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:24-28 NIV)

I think the image they used of the *Arma Christi* – the Coat of Arms of Christ which has Christ's blood flowing from his heart into a chalice speaks both of Christ's death for us on the cross and our remembrance of that in the Eucharist.

So going back to the whole week, the activity was to write a letter to God – did anyone do that – if so do you have anything to share with us?

Let me ask you a question, what do YOU think mission is?

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Mt 28:18-20 NIV)

## Week 2

This second week we are thinking about the first mark of mission “Tell” – proclaiming the message of the kingdom of God.

“What does it mean to “proclaim”?”

What is it that we are to proclaim?

What are some of the ways that we “proclaim” (i.e. not just through speech)?

The thing we proclaim is “the Kingdom of God” or “the Reign of God.”

What does that phrase mean to you? How might you try to explain it to someone else?

I think that the kingdom of God is the sovereign rule of God, initiated by Christ’s earthly ministry and to be consummated when “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rv 11:15). The proclamation of this Kingdom was Jesus’s central message. The establishment of the Lord’s Supper looks forward to the establishment of the kingdom of God when God will finally and firmly establish his reign.

Really this proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God is what we usually call Evangelism.

Ask the group to listen to this verse from scripture:

*‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free...’ (Luke 4:18)*

Those are words from Isaiah which Jesus chose to define his mission

Ask the group to listen to these words from the Gospel of Matthew:

*[Jesus said,] “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)*

Ask: What does this mean to you? When you think of letting your light shine or sharing your good works to glorify God, what comes to mind? How have you (or others) done this?

We can proclaim the kingdom of God in our teaching and preaching (if we do those things) – but also and more importantly we proclaim it (or at least we should proclaim it) in our casual conversations with our friends and in the way we live our lives.

Again there was one of our daily readings that particularly spoke to me – Day 3. It said that Evangelism has a negative connotation in our day and age – images of conquering, winning and converting someone to our way of thinking about God. But actually it’s just *proclaiming* the Good News. The word comes from the Greek *Evangelion* which just means to proclaim good news. It’s where we get the word ‘angel’ from.

Remember in the Gospel of Luke, where God sends his angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to announce to her the great things God is going to do in restoring relationships with God for all mankind – and it will begin with her. And the first thing Mary does is to go to her cousin Elizabeth to share this amazing news. She finds that Elizabeth also has some good news that

she's going to bear a son even though she was past the age for child-bearing. The angel Gabriel, Mary and Elizabeth were all Evangelists sharing the Good News.

When God's doing something in our lives, we should share that – that's Evangelism. That's the first Mark of Mission.

So Evangelism is sharing the good news of the gospel and the kingdom of God with those around us who aren't yet Christians. We can do that with events from our own lives can't we – can you think of good news about yourself or your family you've shared recently?

▪ *What has been the Gospel's "Good News" for you? How has the message of God's love in Christ touched and changed you?*

*If you had to summarize the "Good News" in one or two sentences, what would you choose to say?*

*What was it about Jesus that first drew you to love him?*

*Is there some person of faith who has been a model for you? Who was it and what did you see in them that you particularly admired? Think about the listening hands exercise for this week.*

▪ *What has been the Gospel's "Good News" for you? How has the message of God's love in Christ touched and changed you?*

▪ *How has God been active in your life – today, or this week, or this year, or in this season of your life?*

*How can you help to carry out God's mission?*

Explain that as we move on to the next 'marks,' we will want to pay attention to the ways in which this first "Mark of Mission" influences and flows through all of the other Marks:

*When we teach, nurture, and baptize new believers, we proclaim the Good News.*

*When we respond to human need by loving service, we proclaim the Good News.*

*When we seek to transform unjust structures in society, we proclaim the Good News.*

*When we strive to guard, sustain and renew creation, we proclaim the Good News.*