

Lent course session 1

Who am I? Why am I here?

What does life mean? What is the point of everything?

All are what we call 'existential' questions. (to do with existing). These are questions we ask which should take us beyond our immediate senses and place in the world, beyond the physical to the spiritual.

What do we mean by 'spiritual'?

We consist of components: Physical (our bodies and senses), Mental/emotional, (our Soul, or our individual and unique nature) Spirit. (The part of us which links us with 'God' - or Something outside of ourselves - hence the word 'spiritual')

Being spiritual doesn't just mean 'religious' - religious belief or practise is just one kind of formal expression of spirituality. There are lots of others depending on who we are. One thing for everyone though is that we are ALL spiritual - it is part of our DNA, what makes us human.

Since the earliest species of mankind there has been an inner need or desire to see beyond the immediate constraints of our physical or mental existence - e.g., stone age cave paintings to taking hallucinatory drugs like LSD).

Science has shown there is a part of the brain that causes us to experience a sense of the spiritual if it is stimulated. That experience generally is around being aware of something or someone beyond us, a meaning to things that we are somehow connected with. This is shown in feeling of awe, or peace, or joy; generally, a feeling 'out of yourself'.

What are your experiences?

The 'spiritual life' can be in many forms e.g. religious belief, wellbeing, diet, meditation practises such as yoga - all which seek to put us closer in touch with our 'inner selves' or God.

The claim of Christianity is that God not only responds to us spiritually but has actually come among us as a human being and shows us a way of becoming truly spiritual as we were originally formed by Him to be.

This is 'spiritual formation' - going through life responding to the prompts that are all around us in the universe and in our relationships hinting that there is 'something bigger' out there that longs to be a part of us and to which our inner yearning is satisfied.

Within our Christian faith in the Book of Genesis we read that we are 'formed in the image of God and we are to 'grow into His likeness' - this is spiritual formation. The more we allow God's Spirit into our lives, the more we grow spiritually, and become more aware of Him and His love.

The structure we have in our liturgy and worship are designed to enable us to physically demonstrate and participate in ways of enabling that closeness to happen. Especially in what we refer to as 'sacraments' (e.g., Holy Communion, or Mass).

Other ways are baptism and confirmation where a person publicly expresses their desire to form that spiritual relationship with God and the Church either personally or on their behalf if baptised as a baby, then 'confirmed' when old enough.

Generally, we can experience God in many ways; prayer, Bible reading, relationships, experiences, people, music, poetry, writing, tradition and simply being silent.

The spiritual journey is a lifetime one likened to being in sleep. Sometimes we wake up and our spiritual awareness is alive and thriving. Other times we go back to 'sleep'. Sometimes people don't 'wake up' until a crisis happens in their lives or they approach end of life when the question is suddenly asked or cried out, 'Where are you!'

The yearning for the 'Other' will never go away, God is always seeking for us to find Him and He reveals Himself, if we are prepared to look. Then, and only then do we find peace.

As St Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."