

“What Do You Want?” (An Inquiry Study Guide)

by Rev. David Smith

The next day as John stood there again with two of his disciples, Jesus went past, and John looked towards Him and said, “Look, there is the Lamb of God.” And the two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned round, saw them following and said, “What do you want?” (Jn. 1:35-38, NJB)

Everybody’s looking for something, wanting something: a good deal, better job, a change of life, faith, hope, and even love. Two of John the Baptist’s disciples wanted something. They wanted something from Jesus. Something prompted them to follow after Jesus and inquire. More than likely it was John’s witness to Jesus as the Lamb of God. They wanted to know where Jesus lived. So, Jesus invited these inquirers and seekers to “Come and see.” They did and, as the story goes, they “stayed with Him that day” (Jn. 1:38, 39) which is to say, they remained with Him and He with them (mutual indwelling). Through a ministry of inquiry, hospitality, and witness, Jesus guided two who came seeking into the faith. And they became His followers.

How can we help guide others who come asking, seeking, knocking on our doors? What ministry can we offer to those who answer the divine invitation to “Come and see”? The ancient Church’s answer was what has come to be called the catechumenate. The catechumenal process is a way to extend hospitality, assist inquiry, and give witness to Jesus Christ through, among other things, the sharing of our stories. The catechumenal process provides a “safe haven” for inquirers and seekers to spend as much time as they need to explore their questions, their grievances, and/or their concerns. It provides an open-ended, unhurried time called inquiry in which all would-be seekers can explore just what it is they want from Jesus or ask who God is or lament why there’s so much suffering in the world or they may be curious as to why the Church does thus-and-so or believes this-and-that. They may come seeking Baptism for themselves or a loved because “it’s the thing to do,” although they aren’t sure why. They may ask for prayers, to spout off about something, or to get married. Some will come with very specific requests while others, perhaps many, will come with some vague though nagging notion that “things just aren’t right.” In one instance I was blessed to have a family come seeking the Church because of a family New Year resolution! For all of these reasons, then, and many more besides, they will come asking, seeking, knocking. And the Church will need to be as ready as her Lord to engage those whom He has sent her way in friendly conversation, in an atmosphere of trust and gracious

hospitality, with an ear and an eye to the presence and work of God in their lives. There will need to be others like themselves who have answered the divine invitation to “Come and see” and who will be their companions in The Way.

Some of the ways that we might help others in this time of Inquiry explore their stories and begin to discern God’s prevenient grace in their lives are

- Biography Sharing
- Journaling
- Symbol-making
- Life Map
- Photo Stories
- Written Questions
- Sharing questions they have about their own stories
(*e.g.*, Was it coincidence or was it God?)
- Open-ended sentences like:
 - My greatest hope
 - I’m here because
 - When I think of death
 - What I really want is
- Church Tour
- Parish History
- Liturgical Year
- The Liturgy
- Current Events
- Parishioners sharing their own faith stories
- Telling the Jesus Story (over and over!)
- Scripture stories that might possibly relate to someone else’s story

Of course, the use of scripture, particularly the lectionary, is always appropriate. In scripture we can begin to see how Jesus’ story and our story is interwoven. Naturally, we’ll want to bathe all of this in prayer — praying with those who inquire and for them that their restless hearts, created for God, might find rest in Him (St. Augustine)!

It probably can’t be emphasized enough here that hospitality is critical throughout the whole catechumenal process. People may come for a host of reasons, but they’ll remain because of the relationships they’ve formed with God and God’s people! Making people truly welcome, comfortable, and at home is to evangelize with the love of Jesus Christ while telling His story. In a very real way, the period of inquiry is a “show and tell” exercise.

It is also, however, a time of helping those who have come seeking, asking, and knocking to discern their readiness for Baptism or Affirmation of Faith, as the case may be. A fundamental principle active throughout the catechumenal process is that God the Holy Spirit is already at

work in their hearts and lives preparing the way for the Lord. It is the Holy Spirit, we confess, who is calling us through the Gospel to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. Consequently, we will begin to see small stirrings of conversion in those who are ready to move into the next period of deeper study of God's Word called the catechumenate. Some of the signs we might see or questions we might ask to help inquirers discern their readiness are:

- Do they recognize they need the community to become full human beings?
- Do they recognize a need for Jesus Christ in their life?
- Why do they want to be baptized or to affirm their faith?
- How have they experienced God in their life, in this parish?
- How is their life beginning to change because of Christ?
- Are they willing to follow the way of life of Jesus Christ?
- Are they willing to be challenged by the Cross in their life?
- What is it they want of God at this time in their life?
- Do they show signs of repentance and amendment of life?
- Do they desire God in prayer and are they beginning to call upon God in prayer?
- What is their sense of the Church and what do they ask of the Church?
- Are they worshipping and/or reading scripture?
- What do they feel they need to help further their journey of faith?

We remember that in God's own time He will gather all whom He has created, redeemed, and called by name (Is. 43:5-7).

Sources/Resources

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