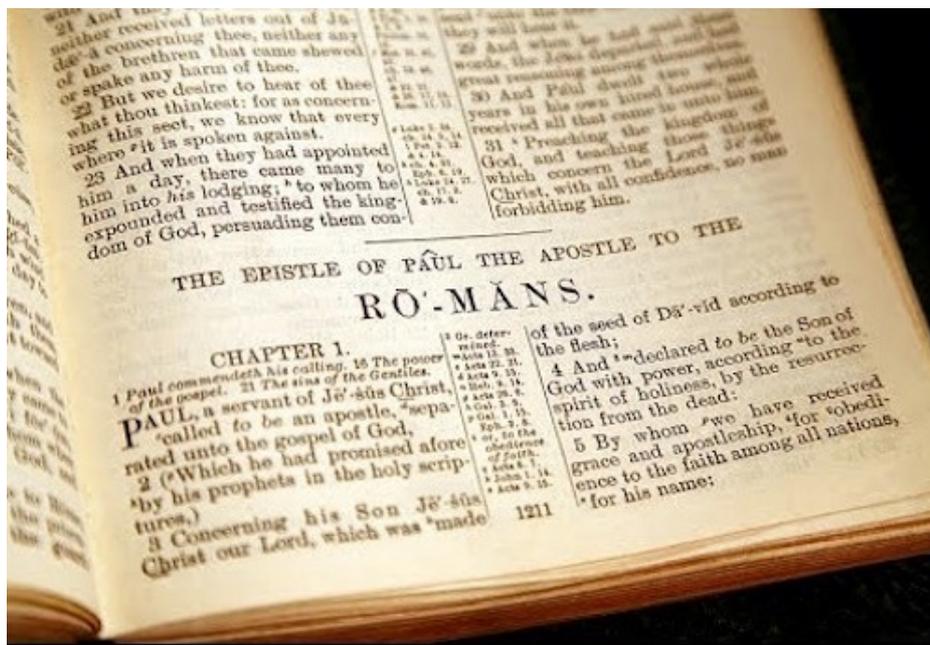


# Study Group on St Paul's Letter to the Romans



These groups happened during July and August 2021 on Zoom.

We used the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (Anglicised Catholic edition) and you'll need a copy of the Bible alongside these notes.

Do let Fr Morris know future requests of topics or books of the Bible you'd like to study.

There's no charge for the book but you can make a donation to support the continued ministry at St Mary's by making a donation using this QR code or putting money in an envelope in a giving box in our churches.



# Session 1 ~ Introduction ~ Chapter 1

## Purpose and content

St Paul is preparing the Christians in Rome for a future visit he will make. His mind has turned to Western Europe and eventually he wants to go to Spain.

Views on the nature of the letter to the Romans vary. Is it Paul's great systematic work of theology or a series of loosely connected discourses? A lot of what he has to say about the Church, the Mass and the Resurrection from the dead, for example in I Corinthians, is missing from Romans.

Paul is writing in the context of a Judaism that has been deeply influenced by Hellenic thought and practice. This is important when reading, for example, the passages of homosexuality in Chapter 1 and it informs the style of letter writing.

It has similarities with the Letter to the Galatians, also written by St Paul. The issues are similar but the context less confrontational. Unlike Paul's letters to the Corinthians he does not refer to particular problems in the local church.

Often which chapters scholars prioritise will indicate what their view is of the whole letter: a comprehensive theological overview (Chaps 1 - 8); a reflection for Jews on their changing place in God's plan (Chapter 9-11) or a treatise specific to the first century Roman Church (Chapters 14-15).

## The Church in Rome

St Paul did not begin the Church in Rome, it already existed by the 40's.

Significant attention is paid to Abraham in the letter and so it is assumed that a lot of the Christians in Rome had been Jews. There had been a significant number of Jews in Rome since they were taken there as slaves 100 years previously. Conflict between Jews and Jewish Christians led to the expulsion of Christians from Rome in 49 AD (see Acts 18:2, where this is said of Aquila and Priscilla).

However, Paul emphasises that he is the Apostle to the Gentiles (i.e. non Jews) in Chapter 1 and this might be an odd way to open a letter to a largely Jewish community. We're not really sure.

St Paul subsequently did arrive in Rome as a prisoner and was greeted by some of the local believers, for which Paul was grateful (Acts 28:15). If Paul wrote Philippians from Rome then we gain some insights of what the Church in Rome was like then. He faces loneliness (II Timothy 4:16) and people serving their own interest (Philippians 2:21).

## **Date**

The information in Chapter 15 points towards Paul writing this letter while he was in Corinth before returning to Jerusalem sometime between 55 and 60AD, within 30 years of the death of Jesus. This is the trip to Jerusalem planned for in Acts 20. It's one of his latest undisputed and unedited letters (though the last chapter might be a later addition).

## **Significance**

Most would agree it is one of his most important letters, if not the most important.

It was a crucial battle ground in the Reformation debates of the sixteenth century. Martin Luther, who began the cry for reform on the continent, wrote that Romans was the most important book of the New Testament. Chapter 1, for example, was also a clear basis for Calvin's teaching which became labelled as "Double Predestination." This heresy said that not only does God predestine the saved to go to Heaven but He predestines the damned to go to Hell.

## **Notes on Chapter 1**

v.1 Paul is keen to show he is an apostle, one privileged with an encounter with the Risen Jesus and sent out for the sake of the Gospel.

v.1 "servant" might better be rendered "slave"

v.2 Paul emphasises the foundations laid by the Old Testament.

v.3 We need to know Jesus and His two natures, human and divine.

v.7 Paul usually begins his letter with thanksgivings, except when he scolds the Galatians 1:6.

v.13 "Brothers and sisters" is literally "brothers" but it is assumed that the letter addresses the whole community. Quite often in other languages using the male plural refers to men and women.

v.13 We're not sure what was seen as preventing St Paul's visit, maybe other priorities or his respect for the fact that the Roman Church had been begun by another (see Romans 15:20).

vv.16-17 perhaps contain a summary of the Gospel: "it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'"

Salvation is a future reality anticipated. God's righteousness (or justifying) initiates this. St Paul is quoting Habakkuk 2:4.

v.17 the revealing of the righteousness of God was traditionally seen as an eschatological affair (i.e. happening at the end of time). Paul here is arguing that this is done with the Birth of Christ with faith reaching its fullest meaning.

vv.18-32 Paul's argument that it is obviously the case that there is one God and not many gods was quite a challenge to the assumption of polytheism of the day. Arguably these verses made Christians quite intolerant of other faiths when they have had access to secular power and been able to enforce their own will. This is less true now.

Some argue that Paul goes off on a huge tangent from v.18, which lasts until half way through Chapter 3. This could possibly make what he says here less significant. There are also good reasons to see these verses as a natural unfolding of his point.

v.18 God is angry in response to our sin. This is not an emotion in the way that we experience anger.

v.19 Paul argues that it is perfectly rational to believe in God and to discern His presence through the created order. See also Psalm 19: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork."

v.21 knowing God is not enough

v.21 there is a spiral of futility and sin as things get worse and worse. See also v.24.

v.23 St Paul echoes Psalm 106:20, which is referring to the building of the golden calf at the bottom of Mount Sinai in Exodus 32.

vv.26-27 This is a contentious passage as it condemns homosexual acts. Proponents of a more liberal sexual morality argue that what Paul was condemning was adulterous relationships and not the love of two men or

two women in a committed relationship. This isn't the only passage in the Bible that forms the Church's teaching of this issue (see also I Timothy 1:10; some might also refer to Genesis 19 but its relevance is debatable).

The Church teaches us that men and women are created equal and that love is the fulfilling of the law. With no less clarity the Church also teaches us that that marriage is to be between a man and a woman (see Genesis 1:27 & 2:24; Ephesians 5:25-33). You may have seen that recently Methodists have voted to allow same sex marriages in their churches.

Some argue that it is possible to see homosexual relationships as valid expressions of love while retaining the Biblical teaching on marriage, such as by having Civil Partnerships. There is then the questions of whether these unions can be blessed by the Church.

At St Mary's and the Good Shepherd, there will not be marriages or the blessing of same sex unions but gay individuals and couples must experience no less of a welcome than anyone else.

## **Questions for discussion on Chapter 1**

How and why do Christians read the Old Testament?

What is faith?

Should the Church talk about homosexuality more?

Does God give up on us?

## **Session 2 ~ Humanity's relationship with God ~ Chaps 2 & 3**

### **Notes to Chapter 2**

The first 11 verses continue the line of argument from Chapter 1. St Paul emphasises the final judgement to come and that we will be judged on our deeds not some assumed status. Note the repetition of "whoever you are." The deeds performed are not restricted to those who know the Law (the Jews) but to all those who "by patiently doing good seek for glory and honour and immortality," (v.6).

v.8 The word for "Self-seeking" links to hired worker in St John 10:12 "The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them."

vv.12-16 Having heard the Law, there is an extra expectation placed on the Jews to do it, whereas those Gentiles who have not heard the Law but still do it are blessed indeed. See also our Lord's teaching in St Luke 12:41-48, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required."

The question arises of what elements of the Law Paul believed the Gentiles were keeping: the moral or the ritual? It seems difficult to make an argument for either of them. Thus follows logically the statement that "God will judge the secret thoughts of all" (v.16). In other words, Paul is arguing that keeping the law is more than just moral or ritual actions.

vv.17-21 This is typical of the long sentences of Romans that translators try to make good but perhaps reveal Paul is going off on a rant.

vv.21-22 There probably are not specific examples that Paul is referring to. It is also unlikely that the Jews of the first century were known to be particularly sinful as adulterers or thieves. This must surely then be similar to our Lord's teaching in St Matthew 5:21-48 where he says, for example, if we look at someone lustfully then we have already committed adultery with them in our heart.

v.22 Robbing temples is in the sense of setting oneself up as a God, being judgemental and condemnatory.

v.24 St Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5. Often Paul is quoting from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament (sometimes referred to in commentaries in abbreviated form as LXX). This was the Greek translation common at the time. In contrast, our English versions are from the original Hebrew and so there will be some variations between the two.

v.26 The "requirements of the law" must mean faithful obedience and a living relationship with God.

### **Notes to Chapter 3**

There are still advantages to being Jewish, Paul asserts, otherwise the Old Testament would be useless.

vv.1-8 Paul is responding to the argument that someone could make: if God is faithful irrespective of what I do and my unfaithfulness indeed shows how merciful God is, why is this a bad thing?

v.2 Paul will return to the privileged status of the Jews in Chapter 9.

v.4 quoting Psalm 51:4.

- v.8 Possibly this refers to attacks made against him in Rome or elsewhere.
- v.10 quoting either from Psalm 14:1 or Psalm 53:1, neither of which have the word “righteous” in the original. The following verses until v.18 are quotations from the Psalms.
- v.21 Good news! Since 1:18 Paul has been arguing that God’s wrath is revealed through various ways. Now, this is about His righteousness being disclosed.
- v.22 here and in another few occasions the phrase “through faith in Jesus Christ” could equally be translated as “through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.”
- v.24 “they are now justified” is often translated as “they are now counted as justified/righteous,” because the tense of the verb indicates a causative meaning.
- v.25 “sacrifice of atonement” or expiation, meaning to wipe away sins. This is also in this noun the sense of covering up. It might relate to the Ark of the Covenant having a lid, which was where God would come and be present. This lid was sprinkled with blood on the Day of Atonement. This is the mercy-seat (see Exodus 23-25 and Hebrews 9:3-5).
- v.25 note the verb “to pass over” is slightly different from “forgive” which we might expect in the context.
- v.27 boasting in works and the life of faith are mutually exclusive.
- v.28 This verse was particularly important for the Protestants of the European Reformation: only faith saved (and Luther would add the word “only” to his translation).
- v.29 even the Jews reading our Old Testament would have agreed with Paul that God was one and God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

## **The Christian and the Law**

When we talk about the law we will mean one of three things: (i) the Mosaic Law, given to Moses and expounded in Exodus and Leviticus, in other words the whole Jewish religion (ii) a general spirit of legalism, of rules and regulations or (iii) secular law. Paul is almost always referring to the first of these meanings.

The Law was our teacher (Galatians 3:24) but is responsible, Paul argues, for the abounding of sin (Galatians 5:20 but also in Romans 3:20). The

argument in Galatians 3 continues that the Law is now not needed in the era of faith: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children” (Galatians 4:4-5).

It may be that Paul’s view of the Law when he wrote to the Galatians had deteriorated. He seems more positive about it in Romans (“the law is holy” 7:12).

Some of Paul’s thought does seem to extend to the second definition of the Law as above, which is a bit broader. This would be opposed to the Life of the Spirit, which is where the argument develops in both Romans 8 and Galatians 5, linked to the concept of freedom.

### ***Discuss***

What laws do we as Christians have to follow (try and be specific)? What do they require us to do?

How does Paul’s teachings on the Law in these chapters change how we think about those obligations?

### **Why are the wicked so happy?**

Do the wicked have a visibly worse life? Does it matter what definition of ‘worse’ we use?

Read Psalm 1. “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked ... In all they do, they prosper. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.” The flightiness of their happiness should be noted.

Pope Francis reflects on the parable Jesus tells in Luke 16:19-31 of Abraham and the Rich Man. The Pope notes that the rich man is not named. Happy though he is according to the things of this world, his name is not known by God, not written in the book of life (Malachi 3:16-17).

There’s a story of a Christian and a non-Christian going duck shooting one day. The non-Christian asked the Christian why he bothered believing in God given his life was so difficult and the life of the non-Christian questioner was so good. The Christian pointed to the dead ducks in the boat and then to some ducks flying overhead and asked, “Which ones would you rather shoot at?” The non-Christian said he’d rather shoot at the ones

flying high. The Christian responded, "Exactly. I have troubles in life because Satan tries to attack my faith. He is not bothered with you because he has got you already."

### ***Discuss***

What benefits does being a Christian give us?

## **Session 3 ~ Abraham and Justification ~ Chapters 4 & 5**

### **Notes to Chapter 4**

There's a definite break by introducing the person of Abraham but it flows naturally from the previous discussion of the Law. The Ten Commandments and the Law more generally was given to Moses, who lived some time after Abraham. In Galatians 3:17-18 (written after the letter to the Romans, remember) we see Paul make the argument succinctly: "My point is this: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise." Abraham probably lived a greater length of time before Moses.

v.4 The concept of the worker deserving their pay is in our Lord's words in St Luke 10:7. Paul quotes it again in I Timothy 5:18. Remember, it is unlikely that St Paul would have seen the Gospels as we read them today. Only St Mark's was likely to have even been finished before Paul's death around 64AD. He may have read passages from them or their original documents or heard the oral witness of Jesus' teaching from some of the Apostles. How much Paul had heard of what our Lord said during His earthly ministry is pure speculation.

In my honest opinion, St Paul takes a long time to make a simple point in this passage, which is that Abraham was counted righteous (Genesis 15:6) *before* he was circumcised (Genesis 17:10,23) and this therefore shows it was God's gift in response to his faithful living rather than in response to the Law and circumcision.

Jewish thought at the time of St Paul seems to have taught that Abraham kept the precepts of the Law, anticipating it (see Ecclesiasticus printed below). However, the Genesis account does emphasise his faith.

Genesis 15:6 ~ "Abraham believed the Lord and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Ecclesiasticus 44:19-21 ~

"Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations,  
and no one has been found like him in glory.  
He kept the law of the Most High,  
and entered into a covenant with him;  
he certified the covenant in his flesh,  
and when he was tested he proved faithful.  
Therefore the Lord assured him with an oath  
that the nations would be blessed through his offspring;  
that he would make him as numerous as the dust of the earth,  
and exalt his offspring like the stars,  
and give them an inheritance from sea to sea  
and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth.

v.16 Faith is not to be turned in to another form of works as often happens in people's life. The point of "righteousness of faith" is that it is *grace*, a gift.

Abraham was told he was to be a father of many nations, including all those who share his faith, not just those who keep the Law. This was presumably tricky for Paul's Jewish hearers as the promise to be a father of many nations was indeed seen as being fulfilled not in all those who shared Abraham's faith but were born of his descendants. St Paul's argument is picked up in Eucharistic Prayer 1 of the Roman Rite, which we sometimes use in our churches: "Be pleased to look upon these offerings with a serene and kindly countenance, and to accept them, as once you were pleased to accept the gifts of your servant Abel the just, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and the offering of your high priest Melchizedek, a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim."

## **The role of Abraham**

How much does Abraham affect our faith today?

We see lots of good examples in his life of leaving his homeland, believing he would be a father to many nations even when he was 75 years old. We see him being willing to sacrifice his only son Isaac (Chapter 22). He is given a divine revelation at Mamre and able to plead for mercy on behalf of sinners (Genesis 18). We've explored previously how he was counted righteous, even before his circumcision (Genesis 15 and 17).

There's an old prayer for the conversion of England that draws comfort from God's response to Abraham: "and do thou, who didst so often spare thy sinful people for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, now, also, moved by the prayers of our fathers, reigning with thee, have mercy upon us, save thy people, and bless thy inheritance."

In St Matthew 22, Jesus is answering a question about who will be married to whom in Heaven. He continues, "And as for the Resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you but God, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? He is God not of the dead but of the living.'" This statement, which seems to assume Abraham is sharing in this Resurrection, points us to the gift of eternal life.

Abraham is a point of shared ancestor ship with Jews and Muslims. The collective adjective "Abrahamic" is used of the three religions because of this.

God's fidelity is seen in the life of Abraham. See the Magnificat which we say every day at Evening Prayer: "He protects Israel, His servant, remembering His mercy, the mercy promised to our fathers, to Abraham and His sons for ever."

## **Chapter 5**

There are some glorious passages, especially verses 1-8 and 17-18.

### **Notes on vv.1-5**

Being justified is just the start of God's plans for us. It means a new life which is then described for us in chapters 5 - 7.

v.1 Is something the world cannot give (St John 14:27) and which Jesus breathes on the disciples following the Resurrection. It puts right our relationship with God, others and the world.

v.3 In a subtle way this begins to answer the question posed in Chapter 2 of how justification leads to salvation and a moral impact on our life: we are to endure and have character here and now.

### **Notes on vv.6-8**

Another amazing set of verses that should trip off our tongue! This is what radical love looks like. See also our Lord's words in St Matthew 5 ~ "**46** For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the

tax-collectors do the same? **47** And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? **48** Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

v.7 Part of our Remembrance Sunday celebrations is to remember those who die for others. The radicalism of God’s love is also evident in the Gospels when we see Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners.

v.8 Our own sinfulness is a point made earlier in 3:23.

### **Notes on vv.12-21**

Adamic Christology is learning about Christ through seeing Him as reversing what Adam introduced to the world. It was commonly taught among Rabbis at the time of Paul that the consequence of Adam’s sin spread throughout humanity. This is seen, for example, in Esdras 3:21, a text known at the time of Paul and close to the canonical works of Scripture: “For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him.” This is also seen in Paul’s thought in I Corinthians 15:22 “For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.”

There is an assumption here that Adam was created to live for ever but lost immortality through sin. This was certainly the pervading way to read Genesis 3 at the time of St Paul but the text itself doesn’t seem as clear. If you read Genesis 3:14-22 it seems perfectly possible that Adam and Eve were always meant to die. This doesn’t undermine Paul’s argument.

This is an important passage in defining the doctrine of Original Sin, namely that men and women are created very good and in the image of God but, “I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). Guilt is something we in part inherit and this in turn corrupts our ability to make good decisions.

## **Session 4 ~ Freedom and the Law ~ Session 6**

### **Baptised in to His death ~ Chapter 6:1-11**

#### **What is Baptism?**

St Matthew’s Gospel concludes with the Dominical command to go and baptise all nations in the name of the Blessed Trinity (28:19). The Gospels record Our Lord’s Baptism, initiating His public ministry, when He was

thirty years old. The Acts of the Apostles and the letters of St Paul note the baptising of whole households (Acts 16:15, 33, 18:8 and I Corinthians 1:16), which would have included children and slaves, so that small detail is a sign of the church's radicalism.

As with all these things, the Church needed to articulate over time exactly what was happening when someone was being baptised and this account in Romans 6 is perhaps the earliest attempt to do that. Paul doesn't use the language of being reborn but He is not a million miles away from it, which might make us also think of the conversation our Lord had with Nicodemus in St John 3.

**Consider** Do you have any questions about Baptism?

## **Slaves of Righteousness ~ 6:12-end**

### **Chapter 7:1-6**

It's another slightly tenuous argument Paul makes namely that if you're married to someone who dies you are no longer bound to them. Similarly as we have died with Christ through our Baptism we are no longer bound by the law.

In these verses and in Chapter 6 it is possible to take Paul too far and say we should not be bound by any laws whatsoever. As discussed in the Introductory session this is a problematic interpretation that crops up some times on the fringes of the Faith (antinomianism).

In v.4 Paul writes, "you have died to the law through the body of Christ." We might think of our Lord's teachings about losing our life so as to save it (St Matthew 16:25). This phrase should also be read bearing in mind that for Paul, "the body of Christ" meant the flesh of the Saviour, the Church and the gift of Holy Communion.

In these verses some of the confusion of Paul's style is evident, mixing analogies of slavery and marriage and never quite taking them to the full conclusion. Contrast this with the use of parables by our Lord.

**Consider** How does it affect our view of Sacred Scripture to be reminded that Paul's writing is sometimes unclear and unpolished?

## **Notes to Awareness of sin Chapter 7:7-end**

v.9 It is not unclear how much Paul's use of the word "I" in this and other passages mean this is a personal experience. Commentators believe these verses are a reference to the life of Adam, something we all share in. It's hard to conceive of Paul speaking of a time when he didn't know the Law.

Read again v. 15. Does this ring true with your own experience as you make decisions? What's a good way to deal with this internal conflict?

v.21 is born out in reality, that often when we're closest to doing great things, the devil tries to lure us away from it.

v.24 Does Paul mean he is wretched now or that humanity is wretched without Christ? On the one hand he knows the advantage of life in Christ now and yet is he saying it is without struggles?

## **Session 5 ~ The Holy Spirit chooses ~ Chapters 8 & 9**

### **Notes on Chapter 8**

v.1 You might have ringing in your ears the last verse of the hymn, "And can it be?" No condemnation now I dread, Jesus and all in Him is mine, alive in Him, my Living Head, and clothed with righteousness divine."

v.11 The word body in Paul's thought does not exclusively indicate our flesh or physical matter, rather it refers to our individuality, us as a person. We believe in the "resurrection of the Body," as the Creed puts it; see also I Corinthians 15:35-55.

### **Spirit or flesh?**

What's the difference between life according to the Spirit and the Flesh? Note that Christianity is not dualistic, believing that matter and substance are bad, and only spirit things are good. We believe God created a material world and it is very good but our relationship with it must be such that we are not controlled by it, but are stewards of it.

### **Consequences of the Spirit-filled life: (1) adoption vv.14-17**

We perhaps take for granted that God is our Father and we are His children. We may even assume that this God is a father to everyone, however the biblical images are always metaphors or similes (eg. Psalm 103:13). It is

nowhere stated that all human beings are His children. This is in contrast to other sects and folk religions that did claim divine ancestry.

The New Testament witness is that we become children of God when we are born again in Baptism (John 1:12-13) and as long as the life of holiness is alive in us (cf St John 8:42ff, I John 3:8).

Translators often use the word “children” in v.14 but St Paul actually uses the word for “son.” The difference between the two perhaps only comes out when when we remember that sons would have inherited an assumed a privileged position. This is perhaps covered by use of the word “heirs” later on. This language is picked up in the Eucharistic Prayer we usually use at Mass: “Have mercy on us all, we pray, that with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, with blessed Joseph, her Spouse, with the blessed Apostles, and all the Saints who have pleased you throughout the ages, we may merit to be co-heirs to eternal life, and may praise and glorify you through your Son, Jesus Christ.”

### **Consequences of the Spirit-filled life: (2) future glory vv.18-25**

**Consider** How easy is it to remember we’re destined for future glory when life gets difficult? Any tips?

**Consider** Read what Paul says about the world in these verses. How does this change what we think about it?

### **Consequences of the Spirit-filled life: (3) intercession vv.26-27**

v.27 Note link between Spirit and searching as in Psalm 139:1 & 7: “O Lord, you have search me and known me ... Where can I go from your spirit?”

v.27 Saints means “holy ones” and here refers to the church gathered on earth. This intercessory vocation continues in to Heaven, of course, where the Saints in Heaven pray for us.

### **Consequences of the Spirit-filled life: (4) conformity vv.29-39**

v.30 Predestination mentioned here is another one of the historically controversial texts, argued over by Protestants and Catholics on the extreme fringes of the European Reformation.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church summarises our faith thus: “To God, all moments of time are present in their immediacy. When therefore He

establishes His eternal plan of “predestination,” He includes in it each person’s free response to His grace: “In this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27-28). For the sake of accomplishing his plan of salvation, God permitted the acts that flowed from their blindness,” (§600). In other words we have to choose whether we’re going to follow Christ or not but salvation cannot be our own creation: it is a gift and God has to choose to whom He will give it.

v.35 Paul was turning his thoughts to his final journey to Jerusalem.

**Consider** What’s the difference between Predestination and Fatalism? How can Christians strive for a better life for themselves and others if it’s all been decided already by God?

## Chapter 9

There is a clear unity of argument in chapters 9, 10 and 11 and some scholars (and indeed Fr Morris!) believe these are the most important chapters in the whole letter. The style changes slightly with an absence of some of the rhetorical questions. There is an imagined interpolator.

vv.1-5 begins with a restatement of ground covered earlier, namely the privileged status of the Jews

vv.6-13 see the purposes of God being fulfilled in successive births despite the odds and Jacob inheriting the blessing of Isaac through Rebecca’s cooperation with God’s purposes.

v.15 quotes Exodus 33:19

v.19 In the Exodus accounts - already quoted from - Pharaoh’s heart is described as being hardened by God (Exodus 9:12).

v.20 So often humans think they know better than God. This verse picks up on the wisdom in Jeremiah 18:1-4, Isaiah 55:8 and Job 38.

vv.25-26 quotes from Hosea 2:23 as God has the right to completely overturn those whom He has chosen to save.

## Session 6 ~ The need for humility ~ Chapters 10 & 11

### Chapter 10

St Paul continues in the same vein in which we left him in Chapter 9, wanting to emphasize how the Gentiles being incorporated into salvation did not necessarily mean the Jews had been excluded.

vv.5-8 St Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5 and then in verse 8 Deuteronomy 30:12-14. He sees them as a contradiction with each other, the former proposing a legalism, the other a justifying presence of God. Paul concludes with the following, which isn't in the original verses of the Old Testament but he sees them as pointing towards this statement:

v.9 The designation of Jesus as Lord is found throughout the Scriptures (eg. I Corinthians 16:22, which it is also used in a liturgical form). Those who encountered Jesus in the Gospels also addressed Him respectfully (eg. "Good Teacher" in St Mark 10:17 and "Son of David" in v.47).

v.12 is a quotation from Joel 2:32

v.14 Remember that the letter began addressing this issue of how people find out about God ~ 1:20 "Ever since the creation of the world His eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things He has made."

v.15 uses a new quotation (Psalm 19:1) to support the understanding of God revealing Himself through natural theology.

### The name of God

The word "Jehovah" does not appear in the Bible. The name of the Lord has always been seen as holy, to be treated with respect. When Moses asks God His name in Exodus 3:14, it is often translated "I am who I am am." The four letters for "Lord" when capitalised in Hebrew were YHWH and from these came the word "Jehovah." It's offensive to Jews to this day to utter this name. At the time of Jesus, Jews had stopped using the word Yahweh and said, "Lord" instead, which would be in Hebrew "Adonai" (which we use in a verse of the hymn, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel") or in Greek "Kurios." For this reason, at Mass instead of saying, "Lord, have mercy," some places will use the Greek, "Kyrie eleison." It's an expression exhorting God to be present.

Name and identity are much more clearly linked in the Old Testament than today: places are named because particular things happen there and

individuals have their names changed to indicate a new status. This continues to be true to some extent for Christians today where we are given our name in Baptism.

The third Commandment is “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:7) but there’s no sense that this is a single word. Misusing the word ‘God’ or ‘Lord’ or ‘Jesus’ are all wrong because they are all words we use for God. See St Ignatius writing below where we’re reminded that the name we’re given for God in the Incarnation is Jesus. Other words we use to refer to God are *titles* rather than names, eg. Father.

The name of God then is not reduced to one word because this would be to limit His character. Remember St Peter’s speech before the Jerusalem Council in Acts 4: “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is “the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.” There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

### **St Ignatius of Antioch, *Against the Heretics***

St Ignatius died early in the second century and here he speaks of the name of God, shared by the Son:

*“Malachi, one of the twelve prophets, foretold this as follows: I am not pleased with you, says the Lord of Hosts; from your hands I find no offerings acceptable. But from farthest east to farthest west my name is honoured among the nations and everywhere a sacrifice of incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering too, since my name is honoured among the nations, says the Lord of Hosts. Thus he clearly indicated that the people of old (the Jews) would cease to make offerings to God, but that in every place a sacrifice would be offered, and a pure sacrifice at that; and his name would be glorified among the nations.*

“What other name is there which is glorified among the Gentiles than that of our Lord, by whom the Father is glorified, and man also? Because it is the name of his own Son, who was made man by him, he

calls it his own. Just as a king, if he himself paints a portrait of his son, is right in calling this portrait his own, both because it is a portrait of his son and because he himself painted it, so also the Father professes the name of Jesus Christ, glorified in the Church throughout the world, to be his own, both because it is that of his Son, and because he himself wrote it and gave it for the salvation of mankind.

“The prophet’s words are doubly appropriate, both because the Son’s name belongs properly to the Father, and because the Church everywhere makes her offering to almighty God through Jesus Christ: *In every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure sacrifice.* For as John says in the Apocalypse, *incense is the prayer of the saints.*”

## Romans 11

This chapter is in some ways the sting in the tail. Remember, St Paul is writing to a mixed Jewish and Gentile community of Christians in Rome. He’s said that the Gentiles are incorporated in to the promises made to Abraham because they are justified by faith.

vv.1-11 makes clear that the logic of what he has said so far is not that the Jews have fallen out of favour: God has not rejected His people. Paul cites the example of Elijah and quotes Isaiah 29:10 and Deuteronomy 29:4 to restate the case for God’s people being a holy remnant.

vv.11-12 There’s an argument from what is beautiful here, which is an important line of reasoning for Christians to consider. What gives joy to God? Paul argues that if the stumbling of the Jews means the Gentiles are given the opportunity for salvation, how much more happy would God be if the Jews came back in to the “full inclusion” of the redeemed.

The concept of a **holy remnant** can sometimes be quite heavily embedded in the psyche of Christians. We’ll see it in ourselves when we’re not fired up for mission: when we’re content to see the same old faces at Mass and aren’t desperate to draw more souls in to the fellowship of God’s people. It’s a mindset which says as long as this small number of people is keeping faith, that’s alright. Don’t let it set in your heart!

v.13 St Paul addresses the non-Jewish element of the community, the Gentiles. v.16 picks up the image of dough being made holy by a portion of it being offered to God as in Numbers Numbers 15:20-21. He exhorts the Gentiles not to be arrogant about their new status using a further image:

vv.17-23 The imagery of branch and root clearly links to our Lord's teaching on the True Vine in St John 15 but we might consider also the Parable of the Mustard Seed in St Matthew 13:31-32.

vv.30-36 St Paul quotes from Isaiah 40:13, which he did also in I Corinthians 12:8. The second quotation is from Job 35:7 and 41:11.

**Discuss** How does Paul teach us that we need to be humble in this passage. Remember also his iteration of it in Philippians 2:5-11.

## **Session 7 ~ The life of the Christian ~ Chapters 12 - 14**

### **Notes to Chapter 12**

v.1 Christian worship became centred on the offering of Christ's Body and Blood, as Paul records in his earlier letter, I Corinthians 11:23-32.

v.3 The message of humility in the previous three chapters is restated here.

v.4 The image of the Church as body can also be seen in I Corinthians 12:12-27. How helpful is this image in helping you think about your place within the Church?

vv.9-10 Paul uses two different words for love here. Perhaps the first type of love ("agape") is more oriented towards God?

v17 While we don't seek the favour of others, we are to "take thought for what is noble in the sight of all." This is a hallmark of Paul's pastoral ministry: : "I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some," I Corinthians 9:22.

v.19 quotes Deuteronomy 32:35

v.20 quotes Proverbs 25:21

### **Chapter 13**

Christianity's relationship with the Roman Empire could easily have deteriorated: the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate had ordered the execution of Jesus, after all. The hatred within the Church for Rome in part accounts for some of the more vivid parts of the Revelation (Apocalypse) where the Roman Empire is depicted as the beast in Revelation 13 and 17, after the precedent set by Daniel 7 speaking of the kingdoms of the earth in similar language. In AD 64 the Roman Emperor Nero blamed Christians for the destruction of the city and around this time it is likely St Peter and St Paul

were executed in Rome. This letter comes from about five years before that and we can assume the animosity was already present. Paul in this chapter is seeking therefore to discourage Christians from being too hateful of the Empire.

Paul's approach to authority is not new: the Jews had long accepted the authority of rulers opposed to them, see Daniel 4:28 and Wisdom of Solomon 6:1-11. Remember our Lord's teaching in answer to the question of taxation: "Give to the emperor things that are the emperor's and to God that things that are are God's" (St Mark 12:17). This is an endorsement of secular authority but gives it limits (i.e. some things are reserved to God). The divine source for secular authority is taught by Christ before Pilate (St John 19:11). St Paul reinforced this teaching with the instruction to pray for those in authority in I Timothy 2:1-2 ("First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings should be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet a peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.")

It's always open to debate how much Paul knew of our Lord's teaching such as we have it recorded in the Gospels. Remember he wasn't one of the twelve Apostles and nor was a Christian until some time after the death and Resurrection of Jesus. In vv.8-10 we have a clear reference to the Lord's teaching as seen in St Mark 12:28-34. We don't know how it was communicated to St Paul.

In this section we see an outworking of the the virtue of justice, which is defined by the Church as giving to God what is due to Him and to others what is due to them.

In vv.11-14 we see the eschatology that is present in Paul's thought more generally (eg. I Thessalonians 5:4-8) This looking to the end times is curiously absent from Chapters 9 to 11, indeed the whole concept of there being time for God to graft in the Jews once again seems at odds with any sense of the end of the world being imminent.

The language of putting on in v.14 is linking to Baptism in Galatians 3:27.

## **Chapter 14**

In this chapter Paul outlines a concern of his that we see elsewhere in his letters, namely a concern for the weak (I Corinthians 8:7ff and 12:22). Issues are referred to (namely Sabbath observance and what to eat) but we don't know the details of the problems in the Roman Church.

We see the exhortation not to judge based on the fact that we belong to Christ and therefore it is not up to us to reprimand the slaves of another.

vv.14-20 Paul again cites some of our Lord's own teaching, as noted by St Mark in Mark 7:19:

Hopefully this passage shows that within the Church you can have people living out different spiritual disciplines and as long as they are offered with the hope of being in Christ they need not lead to schism or disunity.

## **Session 8 ~ Farewell ~ Chapters 15-16**

### **Chapter 15**

Paul reemphasises the need to be of service to others after the example of Jesus, quoting Psalm 69:9. It's a theme we also see in his letter to the Philippians 2:1-11 ~ "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Paul reaffirms his status as the Apostle to the Gentiles, which he's mentioned in 1:1-6. We see this designation given in Acts 15. This is part of the theology behind keeping Peter and Paul together in the liturgical calendar on 29th June each year: with Peter's ministry particularly to Jewish converts and Paul's focus on the Gentiles it reveals the catholicity of the Church.

v.19 Illyricum is in part what we now call Croatia.

v.20 reminds us of the point made in Chapter 1 that Paul had not founded the Roman Church.

v.26 The collection is referred to II Corinthians 8 - 9 and I Corinthians 16.

vv.30-31 St Paul is Aware of the dangers and rightly so as it will turn out: Acts 20 and 21 show what happens.

## Chapter 16

Paul commends Phoebe, “a deacon of the church at Cenchreae” who presumably was carrying the letter to the Romans. There was no postal service for folk other than officials of the Empire. Phoebe’s financial support echoes the nature of giving of a group of our Lord’s female followers in Luke 8:1-3.

v.3 Prisca and Aquila were a married couple and fellow tent makers with Paul (Acts 18:2-3). The circumstances of their rescue of him are unknown. They had been expelled from Rome in 49 when Claudius threw out the Jews, including those who had converted to Christianity. They end up in Corinth but leave with Paul (Acts 18:8). We lost track of them then but presumably they have returned to Rome by the time Paul writes this letter.

vv.5-16 Paul asks his greetings to be sent to others in Rome whom he knew. We don’t really know anything other about these individuals.

Rufus is the name of one of the sons of Simon of Cyrene (St Mark 15:21) but we do not know if he is the same person or not.

v.16 When Paul uses the phrase “all the churches” he means all the churches in different locations. He would want to maintain there is only ever *one* Church (Ephesians 4:5-6).

vv.17-20 A final warning against those insert false opinions in to the Church. The potential for confusion among God’s people has always been present.

### Female deacons

The vast majority of Christian communities have male-only episcopate, priesthood and diaconate. Passages that refer to Phoebe as a deacon are cited by those who would like to see women as deacons in the church today. Deacons are instituted in Acts 6 to help with the distribution of the provisions: it was a very practical task it would seem. It is not clear what sort of liturgical or ministerial role they had: did they preach, for example?

There is no other evidence that women were ordained deacon. Women certainly had key roles in the early church (see how Junia is described in Romans 16:7). Part of the trouble is that the Greek word “diakonos” could equally be translated as “minister,” a more generic role. Elsewhere Paul assumes overseers/bishops and ministers/deacons are men (I Timothy 3).

Presumably it is perfectly possible that initially there was a diversity of practices, which then became more united with time.

### **Household churches**

It was not possible for the Christians to meet anywhere other than people's homes: synagogues and pagan temples would not have welcomed them. A lot of pagan and Jewish religion happened at home anyway. The problems around house churches are hinted at in Paul's earlier letter, I Corinthians 14: the trouble is the inequality it causes in that the leaders of the Church end up being the wealthiest who have the biggest homes and the poor never can afford to lead a Church.

When Christianity became officially recognised by the Roman Empire in the fourth century, Christians could start building churches and the advantages of these places was that there was shared ownership.

### **The location of Romans in the canon of the New Testament**

The reason for the order of the books of the New Testament is not always clear. Romans is the longest of Paul's letters and perhaps this is why it is first to appear in the Bible. Maybe it gives it a greater prominence? His letters to churches appear first (Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians) followed by his letters to individuals (I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon).

### **Final discussion**

Have you valued particular messages or parts of the letter?