



Invited II

GROWING IN FAITH

Episode 1: Season II,

[01:00:09] **Intro** Lyrics

[01:03:17] **Lizzie:** Hello everyone. Welcome to season two of Invited, the mission brought to you by the Catholic Diocese of Arundel in Brighton, and I should say Happy Easter. I hope and pray you encounter the Lord throughout Holy week. As we continue this season of Eastertide, let us continue to invite Him into our lives as we explore more deeply what it means to be His followers.

It is so good to be entering into our second season. We had such wonderfully affirming feedback from you all last year and we are really looking forward to continuing our journey together. If you could not join us, never fear. It is good to have you with us now. All you need to know is that you are known and loved by God.

I am the Youth Adviser for the diocese, and with my colleagues on the Formation Team we have been working hard to bring you a selection of engaging speakers, testimonies, prayers and reflections that will help us all to understand just what it means to be a disciple, someone who chooses to follow Jesus.

You will see we have been able to improve the quality of our episodes by filming in person, which is great. We are here on location at the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation in West Grinstead, instead of being in lockdown and recording everything on Zoom. Praise the Lord. This is such a wonderful place to be with such a rich history. We will try and explore some of the history throughout the upcoming episodes but without further ado, I want to introduce our first speaker.

Father Rod is a Benedictine monk and priest from Worth Abbey and is currently working as the chaplain at Sussex University in Brighton. He says there is something fascinating and wonderful about the spiritual symmetry of God's loving providence, as it was through his involvement with Brighton University Chaplaincy whilst he was studying architecture that he discerned the Lord's invitation to join the monastic community at Worth. Today he is going to speak of God's gift to us, the mystery that we have just celebrated. Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection and how that can bring us healing.

[01:05:36] **Father Rod:** Thank you for joining me. What I want to share with you is about God's merciful love. This is what we've just celebrated in the Paschal Mystery that is the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus and how Jesus has poured out his love for us. It is that love that enfolds and fills us as we celebrate this Easter.

Let us begin by reflecting on the fruits of the past Paschal Mystery. Jesus in His suffering, death, and His resurrection has freed us from sin. He's freed us from the bondage to sin, to death. He's freed us from the prince of this world. He's opened for us eternal life. This is the good news. This is the Gospel. This is what indeed we rejoice in this time of the year. Jesus offers to us His love and His mercy and the question for us is: "What is my response to that? How do I respond to that gift?" Gratitude, deep gratitude should flow from our hearts as we are no longer bound. We are free, we are called into freedom, and we embrace that freedom through our baptism.

The gift of our baptism brings us into life with Jesus, we become part of his body, part of the Church. It's an invitation into a new way of living. It's an invitation into a relationship with the Lord Jesus. It is an invitation to move from death into life. For mortality into immortality. In a sense, what we're invited into is a journey. A journey where the Lord walks alongside us.

As a Benedictine monk, I follow, or rather I try to follow, the rule of St Benedict. A rule written over 1500 years ago, which has been an inspiration for so many women and men down the ages as a particular way of following the Lord. This is what Benedict says in his prologue to the rule. "But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our

hearts are overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love." That is the gift the Lord offers to us; our hearts may overflow with that inexpressible delight of love. Benedict also knows that this life can be, and will be at times, be difficult and challenging. "Never swerving from His instructions, then, but faithfully observing His teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in His kingdom." So there we have before us this path to life but it is a path where each one of us will experience, challenges, suffering, hardship. As well as the joys and the blessings that a life, in love with the Lord, will certainly bring to us.

Do I recognise in my life, do I acknowledge within my life that I am in need of that freedom and that healing the Lord offers to me on this journey? When we reflect on the life and the ministry of Jesus, we see there how he proclaimed the Gospel. In word and in what He said, in what He preached, but also in what He did. Those signs and wonders that we read about in the Gospels were not only signs of Jesus' love and compassion for us but also a revelation that the Kingdom of God was among us. It was breaking into our world. The prince of this world was now overcome and the Lord was calling us into His Kingdom. So those healings, freeing people from oppression of the evil one, raising people from the dead and forgiving sins in these different ways. The experience of the Kingdom became a reality in the lives of those people who came to Jesus. We may ask ourselves, does Jesus still heal today? Well, of course He does and He does that through his Church. He does that through His Sacraments and He does that whenever we come to Him with a heart that is open to receive. We realise too that whatever it is we come to the Lord for, whether it be physical healing, psychological or inner healing, or the healing of our hearts, the Lord hears that prayer. The Lord will hear that prayer. How He chooses to respond to that prayer, we must trust in Him because yes, he certainly does heal. Yes, He certainly does bring peace.

There are times in what we pray for we do not see what we wanted, and yet we trust the God of love and mercy to bring us peace and strength if we need that in our suffering or in the pain we experience. God always hears the prayer that comes out of our hearts. Do I believe the Lord would heal me? Well, maybe there is a question we need to ask ourselves here and it is about whether I understand who I truly am as a child of God. That I'm a beloved daughter, I'm a beloved son of the Father. That God has created me so uniquely and lovingly that He looks upon me with such delight

and joy. That I belong to Him, that He so desires and longs for me to know Him, and to come into that eternal destiny that he has prepared for me. If I can take to my heart the truth that I am a child of God, it is God who has created me and sustains me in and through his love, perhaps my heart can be open to trusting God's love for me and then I come to Him in my need He will answer. He is with me, as he promised He would be.

The most important of healings we can receive is the healing of the effect of sin within our lives. When we go back, when we think again about the Paschal mystery, of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. What did Jesus accomplish there but the overthrowing and the forgiveness of sin. Why is that so important? Because without forgiveness of sin we cannot enter into the life and freedom that the Lord longs for us to have. We are marked by it, we are bound by it. We are held in slavery to it. Whereas we may say physical healing, inner healing, psychological healing certainly brings us joy in this world, but the healing and the forgiveness of sin open for us the gates of eternity. That is a healing, that no one who turns to the Lord and asks for His forgiveness, his merciful love, will ever be turned away. We need to always remember that.

We encounter merciful love in such a beautiful way in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. What is happening in that Sacrament? Well, let's just for a moment, reflect on the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We may perhaps call it the Parable of the Merciful Father. We know the story well, how the son goes off and he lives this reckless life and he's driven through the experience of need and want through famine to return to his father. Now he recognises, he acknowledges, in doing that, his need. He is wounded. He has sinned. He goes back to the father already in his mind, knowing the words he will speak. "Father, I have sinned against you and against Heaven", but the father is waiting for him, longing for him, he sees him a long way off, he runs to meet him, and he clasps him to his heart. The son doesn't even have the chance to say those words. The father's love embraces him. In that moment, such healing, such freedom. This is a beautiful image to us of what happens in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Where the love of our merciful Father enfolds us. In a sense, it's not so much about what we have done or failed to do. It's about being open to receive that gift. A forgiveness that the Father so wants us to experience. In this is true freedom, in this is true healing. It enables me to be free of the burden of the past. So, what I do when I come to the Father, is I acknowledge I am wounded, that life has wounded me. That I sin, that I fail, that I'm vulnerable. I

acknowledge my need for forgiveness. Only the Lord can free us from sin. In humility and with the integrity of heart to acknowledge my need I open my heart to the Father. I accept that gift of Divine Mercy as a beloved child of God. In doing that, I experienced the freedom that it brings.

There are three dimensions to forgiveness. That of accepting God's forgiveness. I need to have the humility to do that and I need to have the integrity to acknowledge my need for that. I also need to forgive myself. This is really important. I may say God forgives me but somehow I'm not able to forgive myself. This means I remain in a sense, trapped by that guilt, by that sin. We need to forgive ourselves because God has forgiven us. I can forgive myself. I can move on from the shame and the guilt into that freedom. The key to all this is forgiving those who have wounded me because this can be a real block to receiving the Father's merciful love. If I say yes, I want to receive God's mercy and we say that every time we pray the Our Father. Father, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. This is a key spiritual teaching. I need to forgive as I am forgiven. If I cannot forgive, I remain again bound by that wound. I remain bound by the past and what has happened to me. In forgiving I open my heart to every grace and blessing, and the healing that flows from that. I don't want to be held in bondage any longer. So I come to the Father, I lay before Him what is on my heart. And as we know, forgiveness is not so much about feeling. It's an act of the will, I choose to forgive. I may not feel like forgiving, but I choose to forgive, and I pray for the grace to forgive. God's grace is there. All this is important because in experiencing God's merciful love for us, we're able to move into this freedom that He won for us. Everything that Jesus accomplished on Calvary is experienced in God's merciful love when we open our lives to Him.

I guess the question for us is how free do we want to be? Am I willing to risk everything in opening my heart to the God who comes with such mercy and love for me? Am I willing to risk everything? And maybe, just reflecting on what God may say to us, when we are perhaps struggling. Where He's inviting us into the freedom that He's won for us, the joy that can only come through knowing and experiencing His love. You are mine. I love you. With an everlasting love. There is nothing I will not do for you. I want you to experience my love, to experience the freedom and peace that only I can give to you. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Come, trust in my mercy and love. Sometimes I think maybe we can be more demanding on ourselves than God is on us. We can be harder on ourselves.

But let us in this beautiful season of Easter open our hearts, our lives to the graces that flow through the Paschal mystery.

This coming Sunday, the second Sunday of Easter, is known as Divine Mercy Sunday. What a beautiful title for this Sunday. What it opens up for us is that image of the divine mercy. And many of you will be familiar with that image. It's an image, a revelation that was given to St. Faustina by Jesus. She was a young nun, she died in 1938. In her diaries were revealed to us this incredible mystical relationship with Jesus. In that relationship, Jesus revealed to her the truth about His divine mercy and how in a very particular way, this mercy flows out through His wounded heart upon the world. The graces that are there for anyone who would accept and receive them. We are given so much. The Lord has given us His life and His infinite love.

So let us, as St. Benedict reminded us, allow our hearts to overflow with that inexpressible delight of love, which in itself is a gift to us. In receiving that love, we then become witnesses to the infinite loving presence of the Lord in and through our lives because we have been touched by that love and mercy. We know His forgiveness, we know His healing, we know that love and we can witness to it. Through our lives others can come to know that love.

Loving Lord, we thank you for all that you have done for us. For your love, Lord, that was poured out upon each one of us on Calvary. I thank you, Lord, that you have freed us from our bondage. That you heal us of our wounds. That you give us strength to endure our challenges and sufferings. I thank you that you are always with us. Calling us ever deeper into your merciful love. Leading us into your Eternal Kingdom. We praise you. We thank you. We adore you. Hallelujah.

[01:27:35] **Lizzie** Oh, my goodness. Thank you so much, Father Rod, for that really wonderful talk. It has really helped to set us up for the rest of the season. What an amazing gift we have been offered. I pray that the rest of the season will help us to explore more deeply how we could say yes to this gift. Share this gift. Find consolation in this gift and most importantly, allow this gift to transform us and our communities.

After each talk, we are going to take the time to meet a member of our diocesan community and hear a little about their story. Today we meet Graham, a parishioner at Christ the King in Steyning.

Graham has spent the last 40 years working with technology, which his friends think is hilarious, as he's not really that interested in it, but he was advised by his dad to take that route. He is grateful for the security it has provided him. Graham's real passions can be seen in his hobbies: arts and literature. And when we met on Zoom to prepare, I was amazed by the amount of paints and brushes I could see behind him. That's one of the good things about Zoom, you can spy on people's home lives. Graham has four children, four grandchildren, and three dogs. Today he's going to share his journey to faith at quite a difficult time in his life. Graham, thank you so much for joining us here at the shrine of West Grinstead. It's a beautiful place, I know you've just had a tour, haven't you?

[01:29:02] **Graham** Yes, it's remarkable.

[01:29:04] **Lizzie** It's gorgeous, isn't it? Thank you for being here and thank you for sharing your story, it's a lovely story, so I'm excited for everyone to hear it. Give us a bit of background first. Have you always been a Catholic?

[01:29:16] **Graham** No.

[01:29:18] **Lizzie** Simple answer.

[01:29:19] **Graham** It's funny because I can sort of discern a guiding hand through my whole life. I started going to church, to United Reformed Church. I went there because my friend David went there and we played together all week. Sundays, in those days, was the only chance to see each other and have a laugh. We went to this United Reformed Church and I had a succession of three ministers there that I think had a profound effect on me through my life.

[01:29:51] **Lizzie** There was quite a difficult time in your life more recently and that's when you came to faith more deeply. Would you mind sharing some of that with us?

[01:30:00] **Graham** Yes, sure. Well, at Sunday school, there was a little three year old girl who had a couple of mates. They used to run around generally annoying me and I looked down at them and said "I have got to keep them under control." Then in my teenage years, they started making up the

youth group that I belonged to at the church and we became friends. Then when I was 16, I had enough of formal education so I went to merchant navy as an officer cadet for radio. I went away for three years to do that and I'd had absolutely no intention of going to sea. It's kind of bizarre direction to suddenly move off in but they gave good electronics qualifications, that was sensible. When I came back, David, the same friend who I've been friends with for 50 years, which is hard to imagine, but David was acting as one of the leaders of a youth group they have in the United Reformed Church called Pilots, a sort of nautically based St Peter, fishing kind of thing. I used to wait in the car outside to go to the pub and David would be inside looking after all these kids, giving them games and teaching and all this sort of thing. One day he said to me "Well, why don't you come in as well?" So I did, and I ended up as the Treasurer within a couple of weeks. You know how this works, being a member of this little group meant I had to go to church once a month, so I started going back to church. At the church, I met Amanda, she was one of the three year olds. Now she was 16, 17 and we started dating. When she was 21 and I was 24 we got married.

I can remember a conversation with God. I just dropped her off at home and I sort of looked at the sky and said, you know what, I think I'm going to have to marry this girl. So it really was like that. Is that okay? That was as deep as I got at those moments. I thought I was maybe just following my own wishes more than God's. But in hindsight, we were so blessed in our marriage that I can't believe that Christ wasn't a part of it, that it wasn't His intention. It was.

We had four children, boy, girl, boy, girl. They're all grown up now. 30 years we were married. I can't say we didn't have a crossword because we did, it's normal, it's life, but we were generally extremely happy. We were ticking along, enjoying ourselves, looking forward to long retirement and we were going on holiday more without the kids, because they'd all grown up. They have all got partners, husbands and wives, and they're off doing things. We started to get grandchildren. We had three grandchildren, which was fantastic. Amanda was really happy. We went on holiday to Montenegro, had a brilliant holiday, came back and Amanda said, I've got indigestion and I went, oh, right, something I get like every other week. She said, I've never had it before, and it won't go away. So she went to the doctors and the doctor gave her the normal medication for indigestion and two weeks later, she went back. At that point, the doctor asked her to lie down and she felt her tummy and immediately sends us to the hospital. Amanda said, I saw her face change. Then we had

endoscopes and every type of scan known to man, PET scans, MRI, all sorts of things and they told us just before Christmas that she had stage four stomach cancer. It was just before Christmas. Amanda was so brave, she didn't shed a tear. She just said, "How long have I got?" And they said between 12 and 18 months, but it turned out she only had six months.

You're at the lowest you can be at that point. I'm sure plenty of people are there and I think of them every day. I was taking over more and more of the duties around the house. First Amanda didn't seem ill. She was just normal-self blustering around, cooking dinner, doing the usual stuff but then she started getting more tired. I remember her suddenly one day saying, "Oh, I need to go up to bed." and that was so out of character. She used to have a go at me for falling asleep after lunch so for her to go upstairs was big.

One of the things I had to do was walk the dogs, so I used to take them up to the downs in the morning, walking along, and I'd be happy about seeing them and I'll be listening to classical music. I love classical music, particularly John Taverner, I love his music. It's religious, most of it, and you start thinking about things again. One of the things I knew about him was that he converted to the Greek Orthodox religion and so I thought I'd read a bit about that. Why did he do that? It seems like such an outlandish thing for a Brit. I started reading up about it and listening to more religious music that he composed and enjoying that. Then I learnt about hesychasm, repeating prayers, particularly the Jesus prayer, it is really simple. Lord Jesus, son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Just repeating it again and again and so I started doing that while I was walking, and it was a good couple of miles I walked, so that's a lot of Jesus' prayers. I would get back in the car and go home and carry on with my day. Then I thought there must be a Greek church somewhere around and I found one in Brighton. I thought, that's doable, I could get into Brighton easily enough from where I live. But then I saw, "We do Greek classes on the Thursday evening", and my brain can't do that. I can cope with one alphabet. I can't cope with two or more. I thought, well, I need something that's a bit more culturally closer to where I am and these are all kind of slow thoughts because I'm not smart and it takes a long time for the penny to drop. So, I immediately found the Catholic faith, it was just obvious to me. Then I got to know a little bit of history and you can see it's the sister of the Orthodox. It's the western culture, which is what appealed to me. It's a bit easier. I don't know, I think there is a lot more to it than that. So I started reading about the Catholic faith and I looked

up our local website and found our local priest on there and I thought, okay, I'll think about this a bit longer but then I also learnt about the Hail Mary prayer and the rosary and how the Hail Mary prayer is repeated. I thought, Oh, I like repeating things, so I kind of mixed it up, as the kids would say. A few Hail Mary's in with a few Jesus' prayers to sort of just keep me going on my walk. I was doing this every morning, every day. Amanda was getting a bit worse and the hospice started sending nurses who were angels. 2 in the morning, 2 at lunchtime, 2 in the evening. They have a fantastic service they call the Echo Line, which you can ring day or night, twenty-four hours, to speak to a nurse and they are flying nurses around the county. If Amanda struggled to get her medication pain relief right, I would be ringing them at two o'clock in the morning and then two lovely nurses would arrive, give her an injection and she'd relax and be peaceful. Anyway, all this was going on, and I was I was fretting about it but I think early on, I kind of realised there was absolutely nothing I could do. I could keep the house running. She didn't really want anything to eat, but I could do the cooking endeavors.

We were in the first lockdown, so it was really strict and we were on the shielding list. Everything was being delivered to the house, either by wonderful neighbours who just rallied round, family, or the medical service. We ran into a hitch with delivering morphine because the volunteers weren't allowed to handle the morphine. So that was all going on and I'm still praying every morning.

One day, it was February, howling gale horizontally across the top of the downs, straight off the sea. I was trudging through it with a woolly hat on and my coat done up. The dogs were loving it, running around. I got to the point where I turn around and come back and the reason I do that is because the other side of this gate is a pig farm and the pigs are only enclosed by one wire electric fence, which stops the pigs, but would have no effect on the dogs. So to avoid any trouble I just stop there and come back. As I turn round, everything seemed to slow down a little bit. I wasn't so aware of the wind and suddenly I could smell roses, it was so overpowering. I was sniffing my Mondial coat. I was looking around for any probable source. I was next to a pig farm. I wasn't thinking I'd smell roses. It lasted for ages and I was having this conversation with myself saying, you're not mad, you can actually smell this and breathing this beautiful smell, I just couldn't understand it. I said to myself, remember this, remember this, and it didn't go away. I stood there, I don't know how long, and then I thought, well, I better get back to the car. I walked for quite a while before it went. I got

back to the car and I was sitting there. I didn't know what to make of it. I may be dimly aware that some people smell roses, but it wasn't at the front of my mind. I went home Googled it and found out that it does happen. I can't remember the phrase they used. Sometime like after ardent prayer or something like that, which I didn't think I was doing but maybe I was. Maybe I was just lost in a meditation about it because it's literally all I was thinking about, Amanda, and the state I was in. I had turned it over to God at that point because I thought, there's nothing earthly I can do for Amanda, apart from look after her. I can't cure her. So I thought, I'm going to have to contact my local priest. Here we go. A big moment for Graham. So I sent him an email. This is Father Graham, Adur Valley, St. Peter's in Shoreham and Christ the King Steyning and The Towers. I said to him, you don't know me, it's one of those, but something strange is happening to me. I explained the situation with Amanda, he came straight back immediately and said, Mary is with you. She's showing you that she's with you and she's not going to leave you. She's staying with you through this. I sat back in the chair and thought, Wow, why me? I'm an idiot, you know? But you know what I mean, I'm not special as they say. I'm just the normal regular Joe just going about his business. Why is this happening to me? I described it as when you throw a stone in a pool of water, you get the ripples coming out, the realisations and the things I had to accept were like those ripples. The first thing was, well, I smell roses. I definitely did. I didn't not smell them. I didn't think might have smelled them. They were absolutely clear as the day. I haven't been drinking. It was before nine a.m, I had not been drinking. There was nothing that would explain it. February and a howling gale on top of the downs next to a pig farm. It's undeniable for me. So, if that had happened, then Mary was the source of it and if Mary was the source of it, then she was real. She wasn't a figment of the imagination. She was there and she did this and if she is, then her son, he's real. He's involved in Earth and they're all involved in Earth. It just ricochet, ripple down and I thought, Well, there you go then. That settles it. No debate in my mind at all.

Lizzie Father Rod just gave a beautiful talk about finding healing and peace in the Lord. Would you mind just sharing a little bit.

[01:45:14] **Graham** Yes, and that's what I believe all this was about. Amanda was getting worse. As the pain relief increased, her consciousness decreased, and so it was very hard to have conversations with her. That's tough because I had this amazing experience, but I didn't feel I could

share with her because I didn't want to make her last months worse by having a brooding on something.

I did have a conversation with her about faith, which I hang on to now as well. Where I said to her, why didn't we have our last child baptised? She said, because I'd lost my faith by then. I said, why did you lose your faith? And she said, because there's too much pain in the world. I said, yes, but it's a fallen world and the enemies, they're trying to make it worse. I saw her eyes change, and I think she absolutely thought that. We're not working in a vacuum. The enemies out there to try and sow confusion and any other technique you can use to throw people off the true path. She got that, and I was really pleased about it because it was one of the rare moments that she was lucid. I think even if I wanted to tell her about roses, it would have been so hard because she was in and out of consciousness and that was literally the length of the conversation.

I set about inviting her friends to see her, her family, and organising all of that. My kids and their partners, and grandchildren all came back and spent lockdown with us. I've since heard other people in the road, What's going on up there? There's people in and out all day. It's supposed to be lockdown. The oncologist had said to us, you start doing shielding and you do a good job of it, but eventually you think, I want to see people and it won't matter if you contract COVID, to be blunt. So we were good, we were very good for a long time, but when it became obvious, one of the nurses sat us down and said, I think there's been a significant change. That was when we had family and then Father Graham, I've been conversing with him on email, he said, do you mind if I send you something in the post? You can spray it with antiseptic or something. He sent me a little rosary and the Divine Mercy chaplet leaflet. I read on the back of the leaflet, the last paragraph, it's almost as if it was written for me. The last paragraph is in bold, and it says, if this chaplet is told them, tell them, if they pray the chaplet in the presence of someone who's dying, just one time, then I will stand between them and the Father, not as just judge, but with Divine Mercy. I thought, well, that's being produced, folded and delivered to me, specifically for me right now. So as Amanda slept, I used to pray the chaplet. My Hail Mary's, the most erratic Hail Mary's, have turned into the rosary and my life of devotion had begun. I even prayed the chaplet with her on the evening that she died.

I found myself. I noticed suddenly she wasn't breathing. I said to the nurse, she's not breathing, and she just started rubbing my back. All I could say was the Lord will look after you. My kids were there. They'd all come upstairs and they all knew what was happening. All of her children were there to say goodbye to her. After a little while, the nurses had to do some tests and they said, you better go downstairs. So we went downstairs and I collapsed in tears and told them everything that had happened to me. In me, I'm thinking they're going to think dad's lost the plot but actually, they just hugged me and told me it was beautiful and all this sort of thing. And that was that. Then a week or so later, Father Graham said, Look, I'm itching to meet you. Would you like to come to the church at some point? It was June 28th that she died and the first set of lockdowns were relaxing. So I went to the church. I said, well, I see from the timetable that there is Divine Mercy or adoration and Divine Mercy on Thursdays. I'll come to that because I know the Divine Mercy. I went there and I went into the church, it was dimly lit and there was a star on the altar. I took a seat somewhere and I didn't know what was going on there. There were people everywhere around the church and I didn't know what I should be doing but I thought, well if I just sit here for a bit, then they'd get on with it and at some point the Divine Mercy chaplet will be said, and I'll be right there with them. I thought, more time went by, and adoration could take a while, quite rightly, but I didn't know that's what it was. I was sitting there and I was thinking, oh, this was a mistake, I shouldn't have come and at that precise moment, I had the strongest image in my mind and it was Amanda, probably about 30 years ago. She used to do this exaggerated wave at me, she was grinning, and she was waving at me and I just sat there with this in my head. To the right of her I could see the outline of a much taller person, but I could only see the age, just the fabric of a white robe and it wasn't silk, it was quite a rough robe. I was aware of woolen threads and things like that but I could see no flesh, just the very edge. By the time the adoration and Divine Mercy was over, I was crying like a child again. I went to Father Graham and told him what I could see. He just said, the Lord has sent you a consolation, hang on to it. Since then, you know I am a human, every now and again, I find myself thinking, I wonder if Amanda really is alright. I just keep getting this thought in my head that it's simple, and I have done what I promised. Every time, that's all it says, I've done what I promised, and I said, oh, okay. It's not an angry voice, but it is firm. It lifts the spirits and the healing is incredible, because I dived into my church family. I started going to the prayer groups. The Rosary group on a Monday night, Divine Mercy chaplet on a Friday, and all the other church activities. I absolutely love them and love everybody I've met. I describe it all as being like in the lounge dimmer switch, when you

turn the lights down and it gets dimmer, and dimmer, and dimmer and you have a nice, quiet evening. It's like a dimmer switch on my pain because everybody loses someone, and every bereavement is different, but everybody suffers hugely. That's why Christ pulls it out in places and talks to us about those who mourn. You're suffering so you become closer to Christ, and that's what happened to me.

I was breezing along as normal adult in the 21st century, worried about the petrol prices and all the other stuff that we think about all the time, not really giving Christ or God any thoughts. I just occasionally, when I was feeling low or something, had consistently bought Bibles throughout my life, I didn't read them that much. I've got very impressive bookshelf. That was changing, you see, because I went from someone like that to someone who, I think accepted the total reality of everything and that God is intimately involved in what happens in the Earth. It's that old Holman Hunt painting where there's no doorknob on the other side. We have to open the door and let him in, and I've done that, I got the zeal of the convert. I was reading every book I could find. Thankfully, 2000 years of books have been written so I didn't run out. I didn't think, oh what I'm going to read next, it was like an adventure because I would find myself reading Augustine one minute. He almost makes me laugh because he talks about, why do I like to listen to the lies that tickle my ears instead of doing my work. I just say, wow that's so applicable for today. Why do I go and watch something on the television when I should be reading scripture or praying or something else, but because I went from that person to this person there's only one thing that kind of categorises or explains the change. It is actually that, I came much closer to Christ, and that's what the suffering did, it pulled me closer to Christ. I try and understand it in my simple way but that's what happened. That's how suffering brings you closer to Christ and at the same time, our blessed mother. She wrapped her mantle around me, and she turned down that dimmer switch so that I wasn't desperate. I was in pain. It's like one of those annoying injuries you pick up and you just have to limp along with it for a bit.

The consolation that Amanda's just dandy as Americans would say. Sometimes at the Eucharist I can almost sense her behind the host. It's incredible. The moment she died I said, right, the rest of my life is for Christ. I've spent a long time asking, do you want me to share these or is this private? I don't get any message not to share it. So I think it's okay.

[01:56:52] **Lizzie** So here you are.

[01:56:52] **Graham** Here I am. I think it's our job to encourage each other. I wouldn't be saying any of this if I didn't believe it completely and I've seen no downside. That's the thing. No one has had a go at me. No one says you are barmy or anything like that. I've only experienced love from everybody and I am so grateful because I don't know what I would have done otherwise, as simple as that.

[01:57:24] **Lizzie** Thank you from the absolute bottom of my heart, Graham. It's been an absolute pleasure hearing from you today. If anyone is struggling with bereavement, there are resources available on our website, do check them out. Do bring your pain to the church community because we would really dearly love to help you. Thank you, Graham.

[01:57:51] **Graham** Thank you.

[01:57:53] **Lizzie** Thank you, Graham, for sharing your story. It is so wonderful to hear how the Lord works in people's lives, in particular how he can bring peace at a time of suffering. So thank you, thank you so much. I would like to take a moment to talk about the Shrine here at West Grinstead. It is the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. This is a title that has been used for Mary, the mother of God, since the second century. It became really popular in the 15th century when the Augustinians founded a confraternity in Bologna called the Holy Cincture of Our Lady of Consolation. It was based on the tradition that Saint Monica, who was distraught with anxiety for her wayward son, Augustine, was given a sash by Mary with the assurance that whoever wore it would receive her special consolation and protection. Now Our Lady of Consolation, along with Saint Monica and Saint Augustine, is one of the three patrons of the Augustinian order. The Shrine here is a reminder that we can turn to Mary in times of trouble and grief, knowing that she has experienced the pain of watching her Son die on the cross, and that she will console and comfort us. We move now into a time of prayer and reflection.

We bring ourselves into the Lord's presence in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. It's often useful to listen to music to bring us into a prayerful state. The lyrics of this week's song will help us to reflect more deeply on what we have heard so far today.

Lizzie We take a few moments to simply reflect. Can we imagine a world without mercy? That is a place where despair can overwhelm us and bring us to our knees. The gift that Jesus brings to us through his life, death, and resurrection is one of hope. Hope that our brokenness is not the end hope that our spiritual, emotional, and even physical wounds can be healed. We thank you Lord, for this gift of hope.

Now I'm going to pose a few questions, and these are for you to reflect on over the coming days. You are then welcomed to join the Diocese in a Zoom conversation, which will be taking place on Thursday evening, or to join any discussions that are taking place in your parish. There will be time to share your responses to this episode, and there will be a chance to reflect on the upcoming scripture. We will also pray together as a diocese and community. This amazing extended family of faith. That we may experience God's love in our lives more and more. So, here are your questions. Feel free to journal your answers, as this is a great way of really connecting with our thoughts, feelings, and responses.

Lizzie I look forward to seeing you all again next week, as we begin to explore how God might begin to partner with us, as we say yes to his call to follow him. He does not leave us alone but sends us an advocate. I look forward to seeing you then and don't forget, when it comes to the Kingdom of God, we're all invited. So why don't you share this film with someone you think may benefit? God bless you and see you soon.