



# Invited II

GROWING IN FAITH

## Episode 4

**Lizzie:** [00:03:17] Hi, everyone, and welcome back to this week's episode of Invited, the mission brought to you by the Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. We are still here on location at the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation in West Grinstead, which couldn't really be more appropriate, as today we are looking at the struggles we face as Catholics. During the Reformation, a time of oppression and persecution.

The Carryll family owned a swathe of houses and farms stretching through Hampshire and Sussex. A devout Catholic family, they owned what is now called the Priest's House, which was originally a crofter's cottage. It is thought to be the oldest continuously occupied Catholic presbytery in England. During the Reformation, it was a safe house where priests and seminarians could find Catholic hospitality and an opportunity to hide if necessary. The Carryll family even provided a tiny hidden chapel in the hayloft for the priest's personal devotions.

Thankfully, we do not face this type of persecution in this country today as Catholics. But that doesn't mean that life is easy. Our speaker today is Susan, who's going to speak to us about the struggles of life, and how we might understand them in a Catholic context. Susan is the advisor for school and college chaplaincy in the Archdiocese of Suffolk, supporting chaplains to develop the Catholic life and mission of their schools. She is a mum to five children and is involved with St Mary's University [in Twickenham] as the module convenor for the Chaplaincy and Youth Ministry Apprenticeship. We thank her for making time in her incredibly busy schedule to talk to us today.

**Susan:** It's a wonderful moment to be here at Our Lady of Consolation, a place where there has been, in history, a time of pain, of hurt, of difficulty and yet striving through all of that brings about the church still present in our world today. I'm going to begin with Psalm 119, verse 114 which says: "You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word." These words are a moment where we actually think about God being that hiding place for us, that shield.

I'm sure that many of the priests who were hidden in this house were also finding both a hiding place and a shield - they also found a hope in God's word, a hope for their future, a hope that they will be able to strive for all the things that they wanted to do. In our lives, we all experience times - particularly in our spiritual life - when it's not all very smooth and very easy. I remember once being told about the importance of both your physical life, and your spiritual life, matching each other, not one which is better than the other.

We live our spiritual life in our everyday experiences, but there sometimes comes what we call 'the perfect storm'. We all understand it. We've all been there when suddenly events in our lives seem to all go wrong, all at the same time. And that leaves us feeling that either we're alone - that God is not there, that there isn't any relevance in what we are doing.

We experience it through pain, we experience it through struggles. And in a way, we almost feel that there is a distance between ourselves and God. There's a distance in our prayer life and in our relationship with others. There is a distance in who we feel that we can trust and who we feel we can no longer trust. I'm sure that those of you who experienced the pandemic might have seen that as a perfect storm, where events seem to conspire against us - I would call it the pandemic effect. It doesn't just happen at a time in our history where there is a virus. It also can happen in our spiritual life, and in our daily life when we are experiencing very similar struggles.

In each of these moments I want you to keep remembering those words from Psalm 119: "I hope in your word." I wonder how many times (and how often) we have hoped in God's word?

There is a difference between how we actually live and the reality of our lives and sometimes what happens is that we perceive reality as our daily experiences; the hurt, the pain, the struggle. When in fact, that's just the actuality. If we truly understand what we read in the Gospels, and what we understand in terms of God's love for us, the reality is He is always there and is constant - He is going to help us in any situation that we may find ourselves in. And so, the actuality of our experience is sometimes the opposite, in fact, to the reality and by focusing on the reality, we can bring transformation into our lives. We see this reality, and the transformation of this reality, very much in the lives of the Saints, who show us how they moved through the difficulties that they experienced.

There are three amazing saints that I'm going to be pointing out in this session. The first is Saint John Vianney, Curé d'Ars, a very humble man who experienced enormous times of melancholy, never quite believing in himself, but believing in what God wanted for him. He lived in the hope of God's word which therefore was transformative, not only in his life, but in the lives of the poor, in the lives of the sick, and also in the lives and ministry of other priests. The second is St Thérèse of Lisieux, who as a child experienced what we would almost certainly identify as depression, at the death of her mother. How was she able to cope, how was she able to be able to foster a good relationship with God when she saw everything almost dying around her? And yet she was. She was able to come to a connection, which was above her years, above her ability, which transformed the actual experience of death into the reality of new life. A new life, where she was able to give her life over to Jesus, where she wanted to live in his arms. Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus. It's the intimacy that children bring that Saint Thérèse had. She did so, still experiencing times of difficulty throughout her very short life of 23 years but she kept on moving through, she kept on focussing on God's transformative love in her life. And that is what hope is. Hope is something which has activity. It is not just something which we have an aethereal experience over. It is an active force.

Pope Benedict in *Spe salvi* speaks about this transformation of hope, we've got to align ourselves with that hope to be able to live it. St Elizabeth Seton is another amazing saint. I thought about her story very deeply because in today's society she would have depression. She would be diagnosed with mental illness - and that still happens in terms of our own experiences. There are times when we do experience forms of depression or forms of mental illness, and we do actively need to seek support and to help. But there are also times when we experience another aspect, which is I would say, desolation - St Ignatius would definitely look at it from that perspective - where we feel that we are separated from God, from others

and, in some instances, from our own selves and our own thoughts. It's a spiritual state that we're living in and I found that this was very much part of St. Elizabeth Seton's life. But how did she move through it? She continuously considered those small opportunities of gratitude and consolation. And she held fast to those, even though most of her life felt so dark, and again, this is replicated in the lives of many of our saints. So, when we think about desolation, moments in our lives where we feel desolation, what we need to consider is, are we moving towards God or are we moving away from God in those struggles? Have we seen God's active presence in our world? Or are we consumed with our own thoughts and our own ideas.

Unfortunately, sometimes, when we're sitting in a state of desolation, we often have moved away from God, not physically in terms of not going to church, but in not having that feeling that He's there. This is where we need to move towards consolation, towards moments where we can see His presence in our world. It's going to be outside of our capacity to understand. It's going to be outside what we want to do. But actually, rejoicing in other people's joy, being happy in their hope, seeing the small things that God is doing in our life and rejoicing in them actually brings us away from desolation and into the consolation of His arms. And so, storms come, and storms go in our life. But it's how we're able to manage those storms that our levels of spirituality tend to grow.

Nobody ever said that Christianity would be easy to follow. Along the pathway, there are always going to be things which are either going to push us off or move us in other directions. But I want you to think about the story of the calming of the storm, and if we're talking about the storms that we experience in our lives, I wonder where the calming of the storm really sits?

If you can remember, Jesus was in the boat and he said to his disciples, 'Let us go to the other side.' So, it was him who prompted the disciples to get into the boat, and to move to the other side. But it also says, 'and other boats went along.' So, it wasn't just the disciples that experienced the storm. Except, this is the focus that we sort of remember. Jesus was in the boat and was sleeping when the storm came, and as the storm arrived, the fear, the uncertainty, the worry, the anxiety all started to grow in the disciples. That fear and that anxiety caused them to be so concerned that they called out for Jesus - and somewhere along the line, I think they knew he had the answer. Because why did they call him? Why did they want him to do something? Why did they seek him out if they didn't know that he had the answer? Jesus' response was, 'Why are you so afraid?' There are times in our lives when we are *so* afraid - when we are so afraid to open up to others, we're so afraid to seek the help that we need, we're so afraid to seek God's desire for our lives.

Jesus says, 'Why are you so afraid?' It's a question for each one of us. Why *are* we so afraid? Why are we so afraid to step forward? Why are we so afraid to see something new? Why are we so afraid to hear what God wants for us? And so, God needs to calm the storm of our lives. And that's where Jesus gives us direction, he calms that storm - that is why we seek consolation where we say, 'who is this, who is this who has overcome the difficulties that we have. Who is this that has changed the direction of our lives. Who is this who out of all of this pain and all of this hurt has brought new life? And in the same way we almost have to align ourselves with the disciples every single time and say, even the wind and the waves obey Him. Even our boss obeys Him, even our difficulties in our relationships obey Him. That is

how He can calm the storms in our lives. But we have to take ownership and we have to seek Him out.

This story is replicated again at Emmaus, when the two disciples were walking away from Jerusalem - walking away from the experiences they were having that caused them pain - they felt that hurt, and they were running away and wanted to hide, and I think that's sometimes what we do. We want to hide from God, we want to move away from him. And rather than finding Jesus in that hiding place, we're actually trying to find our own hidden place - that's, I think, what the disciples were doing when it came to the Emmaus walk, they were walking away from where Jesus was. They were trying to find a hidden place, not a hiding place.

Jesus walks alongside them, and He talks to them and He reveals His word to them. And then they experience that moment 'Didn't you feel our hearts burn within us?' Now we call it a numinous moment, something which was greater than ourselves. Jesus not only walked with them, He opened them. He opened the capacity of their hearts to receive Him, and that's a prayer we need to pray 'Lord, open the capacity of my heart to receive you' and in so doing, we also have to ask Him to open the scriptures, to receive His word through it because that's the point where we get direction. That's the point when we get affirmation. But also, it's where we get our constancy from.

I also want us to be reminded of Christ's wounds. It's interesting how we experience pain, and we experience struggle in our lives. Sometimes it is very physical and very visceral - and what could be more visceral, more painful, more explicit than the wounds of Christ? He experienced those wounds in His sheer humanity and divinity. Those wounds weren't a sign, they were a physical experience of pain.

I'm sure each one of us has had those moments of physical experience of pain. He has made our pain visible through His wounds. He's made his pain, that pain obvious for everybody to see. Jesus was stripped naked, and He was made to feel ashamed of himself, we've all experienced that in our lives. So, those wounds are not *just* what He did for us, they are to remind us that He shares in the pain and the struggles of our own lives.

Through that moment Jesus also provides hope, hope in the resurrection. He provides us with that assurance that even when difficulties occur, there are going to be 'resurrection moments'. They are going to be times when the invisible becomes visible in our lives, the invisible pain that is within us will be made visible. And with that will come moments when He will also say, 'I share that pain with you, but look towards the resurrection.'

There are times in my own life when I've experienced enormous amounts of struggle. The very moment when that happens, I've been able to turn to the Psalms. Because sometimes Scripture says what we cannot say, because the pain can be so harsh and so difficult, but by reading those words, they can actually bring comfort.

I'd like to end now with Psalm 23, verse 4 because we see the transformation, the transformation of God's heart, and His love in our lives when we read it. It really shows us how much, not only is Jesus that hiding place - is that shield for us, is that provision of hope - but that we can stand firmly in the presence of God. The verse says, "Even though I walk

through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me."

**Lizzie:** Thank you, Susan. What an amazing insight into how our struggles can be so transformative. We have all experienced times of difficulty and sometimes it can be easy to trust in the Lord. And sometimes it's really not that easy. Our next guest, Deana, is going to help us explore that a little bit now. Deana is a retired nurse who specialised in working with people with additional needs. Deana is actually an honorary member of the Diocese, as she spent last year logging into a diocesan scripture study group, meeting with a group of people every week, who were all listening to the 'Bible in a Year' podcasts and kindly agreed to come over from Swindon to share her story. Hi, Deana, thank you so much for travelling all this way to be with us and to tell your story. I'd like to start at the beginning, if I may. You're Catholic now, but you weren't always, is that right?

**Deana:** That's right, yes. Basically, I was going through a really difficult time in life - my marriage was falling apart.

My son, William, had gained a place as a non-Catholic in the local Catholic school and I was attending the parents' Mass and children's Mass. One Thursday morning, I went into the Blessed Sacrament area - I didn't know what this particular chapel was all about. And I went down on my knees, and saw a woman down on *her* knees in the stained-glass window - and I looked up and I thought, 'That's me' and in that moment, the stained-glass window seemed to come out at me. I just sensed a real presence - now, I realise - the presence not just of Jesus, but of Mary.

I had had a calling at 16. I was going to undertake a religious life. Through the Mass, I realised that I had a real calling and I felt like I was coming home, although I couldn't take communion.

My life was really chaotic, it was dysfunctional, but I had order in the Mass. I was part of the Church of England. I was active in my church, but I felt a real calling to the Catholic Church. In 2006 I joined. It took a lot of discernment. In 2009, I was welcomed into the Catholic Church and I haven't looked back, I haven't looked back. Some members of my old church said I would spiritually die coming into the Catholic Church, but that has not been the case at all.

So really, that's how I started. I went on a journey of faith, and that was how I came into the Catholic Church.

**Lizzie:** In this episode, we're looking at the struggles of the faith. It's great to have you here and lovely that you're part of our family of faith. But it's not always been straightforward, has it? You had a period when you weren't very well and you struggled a bit with your faith, didn't you? Would you mind sharing some of that?

**Deana:** I did, in September 2000. Up until 1997 I was really active, I was very sporty and threw the discus. I lived life to the full, you know, right to the full.

And then in 1997 I was diagnosed with full blown ME.

I was a nursing team leader with young people with complex learning disabilities. And I ended up a year in bed. And I was really poorly. I lost my job and was then diagnosed with fibromyalgia, sugar and psoriatic arthritis in September 2016. I was talking to a women's group because I also had some other things happen to me during my adult life, these women were quite broken, and I was talking to them about faith and how I held onto my faith and my last words to this group were, 'If I let go of God, I know He would catch me.'

In September 2016, I was going to discern to be Dominican and explore this calling of going into some sort of religious order. I'd been encouraged by sister Maria - she invited me - and I was going, 'Yes, this is happening, wow this is happening.' But in the October, I started getting some sort of body lock-in - I couldn't put my hand to my mouth and in the November, my son asked me to take him to college and I couldn't get out of bed - I lost my centre of balance, my foot left foot had rotated in - I could trot, but I couldn't walk. I couldn't. I just couldn't move basically.

I ended up in neurology, and was diagnosed with a functional gait disorder due to chronic pain. I lived with chronic pain and fatigue, and my brain had decided that enough was enough. I spent a year in rehab in 2017. I had to learn to walk again, in a Neurological Department Centre. I learnt to walk again on a NASA-provided piece of equipment. And that was it - I couldn't go forward to discern and was pretty angry, I was pretty angry.

You're supposed to draw near spiritually in those times of need. But actually, God wasn't my father, Jesus was not my friend and the Holy Spirit wasn't my guide, and I completely disconnected from the Trinity.

That disconnection was actually more traumatic to me than the diagnosis, I just could not worship. I couldn't attend Mass because I thought, 'You're calling me here and I'm spending a whole year in rehab.' It was tough. I had to go to a department in the hospital where elderly people were after they had experienced strokes. I didn't get it - it just did not make sense to me. I just did not get it. I was really traumatized, I just felt numb, I was fragile, I felt I'd slipped into a really dark place. And my last words were, 'Where are you, Father? Where are you in this?' I just didn't get it.

**Lizzie:** Fortunately, that is not the end of the story, though, is it?

**Deana** No, it's not. It was a very difficult place. But I'm going to tell you, Father Dominick said 'You're in a desert place'. I thought, 'Yeah, yeah, right, you don't say?' But actually, this time, of disconnecting, of not really focusing on my faith, was a transformational time, because I realised that I cannot cope, cannot get through the day without God.

I was part of a young adults' group - not that I'm a young adult. I was supporting a young adults' group. I'm a convert, so basically, we used to have Holy Hour and sit in the Blessed Sacrament area, and I used to think, 'Wow, really what's this all about?' I found it a bit boring actually - I shouldn't be saying that. But, there was this one Holy Hour, I sat there and I felt Jesus say to me 'Come into my presence and draw close to me'.

**Lizzie:** Amazing.

**Deana** And at first I was like, 'No, no, no. I'm like a Jonah. No way. Why would I want to draw close to you?' So basically, I had to learn the Rosary because the Rosary wasn't part of my faith life - I learned the Rosary and the Divine mercy chaplet.

**Lizzie:** Amazing.

**Deana:** From September 2017, there was perpetual Adoration. And I sat there. For the first time, I looked like a spoiled teenager. I had my arms folded, I was thinking, 'Yea, right, I'm just sitting here, this is boring, I don't want to be sat here. Even with my limitations, I want to do stuff, I don't want to be sat.'

Even the little things I could do, I couldn't do anymore because physically I wasn't able. But being in the Blessed Sacrament area and listening to the whisper of Jesus over me, and coming into the presence of Mother Mary and actually exploring and realising the power of the Rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet, it saved me. My Catholic life saved me.

And I realised, although I had disconnected from God, He hadn't disconnected from me. He welcomed me back with arms open wide and drew me back. Just being. And I cannot explain the things that happened in the Blessed Sacrament area. I can't explain the presence of Jesus that I felt in that place. But it transformed my life. And I'm going to say it again; my Catholic faith saved me.

**Lizzie:** Praise the Lord!

**Deana:** Coming into the presence of Jesus, it just saved me. And I would say to anybody who's struggling in whatever form, just be, come into the presence of Jesus and draw near. Because God is your father, Jesus is your friend, and the Holy Spirit will guide you.

**Lizzie:** That's phenomenal. Thank you so much, Deana.

**Deana:** But there's another piece.

**Lizzie:** Go for it.

**Deana:** Although I didn't become a Dominican and join the Dominicans while I was bedbound, I started reading about Don Bosco. Mama Margaret his mother, and Mary Mazzarello. And I got drawn to this mission because of the Salesian family, because basically I have a passion for the young people that are standing outside our church doors but don't want to come in because they are broken and don't feel worthy. They don't feel worthy because of maybe some of the things they've done in life.

I explored the Salesian family and joined a little group in Oxford. And then in November, God had a plan, and I became a Salesian Corporator in November last year.

**Lizzie:** That's so good.

**Deana:** And doors opened - I thought they were shut, but actually the doors opened.

**Lizzie:** Absolutely. Thank you so much Deana. That's lovely, it was lovely to hear your story.

**Deana:** Thank you.

**Lizzie:** I think a lot of people will be able to relate to that feeling of desolation and being in the desert, but it's great to know there is hope and the Lord always guides us home.

Thank you, thank you so much, Deana, for sharing your story with us and thank you for coming all this way. It was a real pleasure to see you in person and not on a screen. I think we can all relate to those times in our lives when things get really tough. And I hope this season of Invited and Deana have inspired you that there is a way through that storm, and that God is always there with you, even if you can't always feel His presence.

Whatever is happening in our lives, we can always turn to the Lord in prayer, to ask for help, strength, courage or wisdom. Or to praise Him in the midst of the storm. Today's music choice is a beautiful reflection on how our souls long to sing to the Lord, no matter what is happening in our lives. I invite you to prayerfully listen to the lyrics now.

**Lizzie:** Father God, we know we are your beloved children. We give you thanks for all you have given to us in our lives. Help us to recognise these abundant blessings and to know that you are with us in times of difficulty. Please inspire and help us to love others as you love us, and to accompany others on their journey of faith. Amen.

Sometimes we might think that when we allow the word of Jesus to take root in our lives, we will be able to overcome everything with ease. The truth is different, and we face constant challenges and issues that cause us to stop and reflect. Here are some specific questions that you might like to reflect on using your journal if that helps:

- When I am faced with a challenge, how do I seek the support of Jesus in my approach to addressing it?
- What if that challenge is related to my faith?
- What does it feel like to be reconciled with Christ after a period of struggle?
- What advice would you give to someone who is struggling with their faith?

I think it's worth taking a moment to reflect on where we started our journey this season. Father Rod spoke to us of God's unending love and mercy. We are in this season of Eastertide, a time when we celebrate the joy of the resurrection and how Jesus overcame sin and death. We rejoice in the fact that we have been saved, and all we have to do is say yes to that salvation. Little by little, day by day, we say yes to more of you in our lives, Lord. Next week, we will be looking at how we find our hope. Not just in the Lord but in the Church that he established here on Earth. We have an amazing guest speaker, Sister Hyacinthe, who always leaves her audience feeling blessed and inspired! So, I look forward to seeing you then. God bless.