

In each of the five seasons of the coming year there will be a chance to reflect on different aspects of how you shape your commitment to Jesus Christ.

Advent: prayer and the joyful expectation of God's mercy

Christmas: God with us, meeting human need, giving hope

Lent: adjusting desires, wiser use of time, space, the earth

Easter: celebrating recovery of our authentic, better selves

Pentecost: using the gifts of the Spirit in God's mission

There is a leaflet like this for each season to help you identify what commitments the theme of that season is asking you to include in how you shape your Christian life.

We complete and dedicate this *Way of Living* on the last Sunday of the Church's year, the feast of Christ the King.

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This Way of Living as your rule of life

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2.42).

From the earliest days of the Christian Church, there has been a recognisable pattern to the regular life of a Christian.

The *breaking of bread* is a reference to the Eucharist.

The *apostles' teaching* in the years prior to the emergence of the four gospels would almost certainly have been their eye witness testimony to Jesus himself, to his teaching as they remembered it.

The *fellowship* is a reference to the association which we now call the Church. Care for the elderly and vulnerable was characteristic of the duty of a Christian (Acts 6.1).

What are *the prayers*? Apart from the prayer of the Eucharist, we know that initiation as a Christian was by baptism with water and the laying on of hands. That was a distinctive form of prayer. But what about other forms of prayer?

Jesus taught by example how to pray for the sick. The letter of James tells us how the early Church followed the example of Jesus in their ministry to the sick (James 5.14).

The disciples were also fascinated by how Jesus sought solitude, to pray in silence (Mark 1.35). They asked him to teach them to pray and he gave them words to use (Luke 11.1-5). He also gave instruction on the silent, solitary prayer of intimacy with the Father (Matt 6.6).

The early Church was no different from us in having to regulate the use of power and the restraint of desire. St Paul is very explicit about this in his letters, e.g. 1 Cor. 5, 6. In this regard he is building on the teaching of Jesus.

Christian life is about transformation for those who know their need of God's mercy. It is the tax collector who prays "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" who goes home justified (Luke 18.29).

Sin is not only about desire and greed: it is also about factions and bad disagreement. "First be reconciled..." before you worship, is the command of Jesus (Matt 5.24).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the prayer of confession and forgiveness of sin is also one of the rules of Church life mentioned in the letter of James (5.16).

The Acts of the Apostles, and the letters of St Paul, are also very direct about another aspect of the fellowship of the Christian Church: generosity. How much money will you give? The startling story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.1-6 is an example of how damaging meanness is to the Christian soul.

St Paul speaks very directly about giving money. He calls it "the collection for the saints" (1 Cor 16.1). It is for giving away as well as running your own Church, as in the churches of Macedonia that "voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means" (2 Cor. 8.3).

And beyond this, Jesus also makes stark demands of his followers in the importance of attention to those in material need or danger. The

story of the Good Samaritan remains a reference point in modern politics (though its origins in Luke 10.25-37 are often not acknowledged).

Equally demanding is the final parable that Jesus tells in Matthew's gospel. When we see the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the unclothed, the sick, and the convict, and we show kindness, "you did it to me", says Jesus (Matthew 25.31-46).

Living this life is also costly at a personal level. "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it," says Jesus (Luke 9.24).

Pain and suffering are characteristic of human experience. Christian faith holds out the hope that they can be the means to something more: life in abundance (John 10.10). God's gift in Jesus Christ is that you should be glorious (Romans 8.30).

What are the commitments that you make as a Christian? Some people still speak about making a New Year resolution. As we begin a new Christian year this Advent, I invite you to make a resolution to put in place a set of commitments that will be your *Way of Living*.