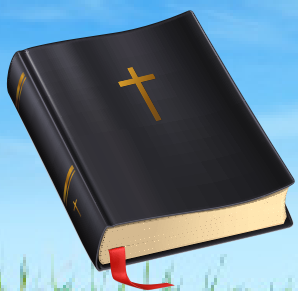


What is the
Kerygma?



The core of the
Christian Faith

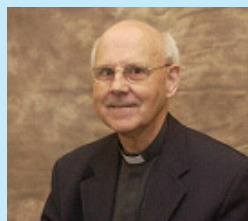
WHAT IS THE KERYGMA?

The Kerygma has come to mean the core of apostolic preaching, the good news of salvation through Jesus - His birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection, His sending of the Spirit, His coming again – with the call to faith and repentance, leading to forgiveness, a personal relationship with Jesus and baptism in the Holy Spirit.

It is proclaimed with a view to engendering faith in the hearers, which is the essential foundation for further teaching and catechising. “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the preaching of Christ.” (Romans 10:17). This faith draws us into God’s great plan of salvation, which started with Abraham and the people of Israel and reached its fulfilment in Christ.

Kerygma (kérugma) is the Greek word used in the New Testament to describe **‘proclamation’/‘preaching’**. In Luke 4:18, Jesus uses it in defining His ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to **preach** good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

It is precisely this proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ that gives rise to the personal faith that Scripture speaks of: “Only a faith aroused by primary proclamation of the Gospel can be brought to maturity. Only someone...



Fr. Peter Hocken¹

observes that:

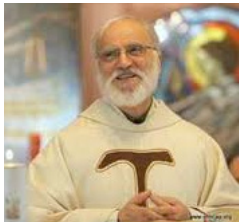
“Many church-going Catholics have been initiated into a **religious system without being led to a personal encounter with the Lord**”. Fr.

Peter is a Catholic theologian, author of numerous books and was a Trustee and contributing writer of Bible Alive.

¹ Blazing the Trail (Bible Alive 2001) p. 26,28

who, having accepted the Kerygma, has given total acceptance to the Gospel of Christ can be incorporated into His Church.”²

Fr. Peter comments: “We do not bring people to faith by teaching them the whole catechism... by argumentation or explanation... The door is the gospel, the good news of salvation... This is not primarily the imparting of doctrine or theology, but the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Only when this has happened is a person ready to enter the catechumenate, to learn more about Christ. We need to be careful that we do not replace proclamation with explanation. Living proclamation requires personal conviction in the speaker in a way that theological or liturgical explanation does not.”³



Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, leading theologian and preacher to the papal household, says in his endorsement of Alpha: *“Alpha is a way which leads people to Jesus but not the Jesus we have known for many centuries as an idea, but the real Jesus, the risen Jesus. One of the advantages of the **Alpha Course is that it focuses on the Kerygma.** In the ancient church there was a clear distinction between the Kerygma and the didache [teaching] of Catechesis. The Kerygma was the starting point of faith and catechesis was to form the faith. Faith blossoms only by hearing the Kerygma”*⁴

Fr. Cantalamessa observes, “The **basic proclamation must be presented at least once, clearly and tersely, not only to catechumens but to all Christians**, given that the majority of today’s faithful have never passed through the catechumenate.”⁵

Preaching to the Pope and a number of cardinals,⁶ Fr. Cantalamessa said “**Gratuitous justification by faith in Christ is the heart of kerygmatic preaching** and it is a shame that this, in turn, is practically absent from the ordinary preaching in the Church.”

² Vatican document: “The Role of Priests in Catechesis” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_15111998_rolpe_en.html

³ Blazing the Trail (Alive Publishing 2001) p.26

⁴ Extract from new DVD promoting Alpha in a Catholic Context – www.alphacourse.ie

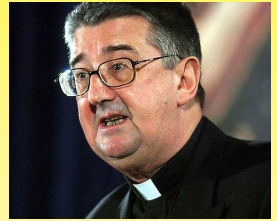
⁵ The Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 49

⁶ “The Righteousness That Comes From Faith in Christ,” Vatican City (Dec 16th 2005).

Only those who have been truly evangelised through an encounter with Jesus Christ arising from the preaching of the Kerygma can fulfil their calling to evangelise. In *Evangelisation in the Modern World*, Pope Paul VI said, “the person who has been evangelised goes on to evangelise others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelisation: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it.”

This kerygmatic approach lies at the heart of a number of courses being used to evangelise in the church to-day e.g. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), Life in the Spirit Seminars, the Alpha Course, Café, the Philip Course, etc.

Alpha is commended by the **Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin**: “We believe that our diocese, our cities and towns, indeed our culture and especially **our young people need to know Jesus Christ. I commend the Alpha Course** as one pathway whereby people can come to a knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ today.”



He went on to stress that, “**Being a Christian** is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the **encounter with a person** [Jesus Christ]... A developed and mature Christian faith requires knowledge of the scriptures. **We have to know the scriptures, to love the scriptures, to understand the scriptures, to prayerfully read the scriptures.** All of us have to learn to take up the scriptures every day.”⁷

One of the strong points of **Alpha is the desire it imparts to participants to read the Scriptures.** In the Archdiocese of Dublin, the Catholic Office of Evangelisation supported Alpha Ireland in hosting 6 Alpha Courses for over 200 Parish Council members, 79% of whom said they now read the Bible more as a result of attending Alpha. 66% said it had improved their participation in the celebration of the Eucharist.

⁷ Archbishop Diarmuid Martin at the launch of the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, Jan 2011
For full extract – see www.alphacourse.ie

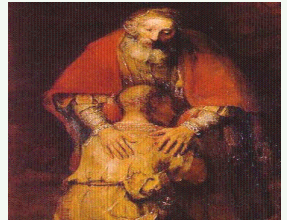


The Eucharist itself has a kerygmatic emphasis, e.g. in the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer: **“To accomplish your plan**, he gave himself up to death, **and**, rising from the dead, he destroyed death and restored life. And that we might live no longer for ourselves but for him **who died and rose again for us**, he sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father, as the **first fruits** for those who believe.” The Creed and acclamations after the consecration are kerygmatic in nature, e.g. “We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your resurrection until you come again.”

The Kerygma in Six Points⁸

1) God loves you

First element of the Good News: **“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son**, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love” (John 15:9). **The love of Christ is unconditional.** “I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” (Eph 3:17-19)



2) All have sinned and are in need of salvation

Our sins prevent us from experiencing the love of God. The Greek word for sin in the Bible is hamartia (to miss the mark). God expects us to lead holy and loving lives, obeying the commandments. We all fail to keep to this mark. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom 3:23-24) “If we claim we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives” (1 Jn 1:10).

⁸ Indebted to John the Baptist Kononia Community in Belfast for the six headings of the Kerygma.

3) Jesus died to forgive our sins

At the consecration, the priest says “for this is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” **On the cross, Jesus took our sins upon himself so that we might be forgiven.** He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). “I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39).



4) Repent and believe

We tend not to face up to our failings. “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind.” (Jer 17:9-10) As bright sunlight reveals dust particles, so the light of God’s love reveals our shortcomings. Even then, **pride can make us reluctant to honestly admit our sins without excusing or minimizing them**, e.g. by attributing them to impersonal factors such as environmental pressures, addictive tendencies etc. We must freely acknowledge and turn from our sinful ways and deeds, and surrender our lives to God.



The New Testament makes it clear that we accept God’s gift of forgiveness and new life by faith, which is itself the gift of God. “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever **believes** in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). **Believing involves an act of faith**, based on all that we know about Jesus. It is not blind faith. It is putting our trust in a Person. In some ways it is like the step of faith taken by a bride or a bridegroom when they say, “I will” on their wedding day. (You can take this step of faith in the way outlined below.)

5) Receive the Holy Spirit and his gifts

“Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). This is a command of the Lord. Without the Spirit we can do nothing, but when the Lord and Giver of Life is active within us, we can do all things. **To receive the Holy Spirit and his gifts, we simply need to ask with expectant faith**, relying on Jesus’ promise: “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). As we ask for the Holy Spirit, we should be open to receiving His gifts, outlined in Isaiah 11:2, and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. These special gifts are expressions of the love of God and help us to build up a loving Christian community. As par. 12 of the Constitution on the Church says, **“These charismatic gifts...are to be received with thanksgiving... for they are exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the Church.”**



6) Enter into Christian community

When you accept the Kerygma you will need to find a group who will support you in your new life of faith e.g. a Prayer Group, Parish Cell or Sharing Group that meets regularly for prayer and scripture reading. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer ... And the Lord added to their community daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42,47).

Paul calls this community the Body of Christ. We are the members and Jesus is our head. It is almost impossible to grow in the Christian life without the help and nurture of a loving community, giving us a sense of belonging, building up our faith through teaching and practical support and thereby helping us to resist the false values of secular society and grow in holiness of life (Rom 12:2).

**“To me – Jesus is my God, Jesus is my Spouse,
Jesus is my Life, Jesus is my only Love, Jesus is my
All in All, Jesus is my Everything” - Mother Teresa**



What to do now

If you would like to confess your faith in Jesus, surrender your life to Him and develop your own personal relationship with Him, here is a very simple prayer which you may like to use in taking that step:

Lord Jesus Christ, I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life. (Pause to ask his forgiveness for anything that is on your conscience).



Please forgive me. I now turn from everything which I know is wrong. Thank you that you died on the cross for me so that I could be forgiven and set free. Thank you that you offer me forgiveness and the gift of your Spirit. I now receive that gift. Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit to be with me forever as Saviour and Lord of my life. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen.

What next?

Read the Bible Daily

For instance use a Bible reading aid like Bible Alive, a monthly magazine giving daily Mass readings with commentary on the gospel.

Spend time each day in Prayer

Talk to God about your concerns and listen to his inspirations e.g. through the scriptures.

Attend a Kerygmatic course

Participate in an Alpha course, Life in the Spirit Seminar, Cursillo weekend, a Philip Course or CAFÉ Course.

Find a Prayer/Bible Study Group

Courses come to an end but there is continuity in Parish groups, e.g. Lectio Divina, Parish Cell, Bible Study etc, where you can meet other Christians who know and love Jesus.

Read some inspiring Christian material

For example, the Christian classics, Christian magazines, lives of outstanding Christian men and women and Alpha literature such as Nicky Gumbel's excellent book – Alpha: Questions of Life.

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