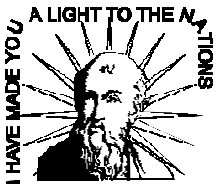
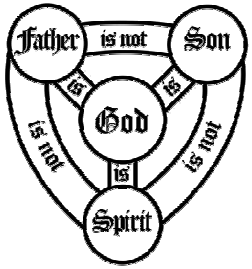
St Patrick's Breastplate

I bind unto myself today,
the power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, His might to stay,
His ear to harken to my need.
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, His shield to ward,
The word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.



So you are thinking of making your Confirmation?



The decision to apply for the **Sacrament of Confirmation** is a very important one. It requires a good deal of thought. This little booklet is intended to help you to make up your mind. Its aim is to help you to think, to question, to pray and to become challenged. Some of you may come to the conclusion that Confirmation is not for you. This will be quite acceptable. It will mean that you have made the decision by yourselves and grown in maturity and self knowledge. Should you decide to postpone Confirmation to a future date then that will also be quite acceptable. Confirmation can always be experienced at a future date.

However if you do decide that you wish to be Confirmed it is important that the **decision should be yours**. It must be something that you want to do. It is not always prudent to take such a decision simply because your friends think they want to be Confirmed or because members of your family think you should be doing so. When this happens you can end up feeling that the months of preparation are a **real bore** and you could end up wishing you hadn't asked to be there. If you do decide at the end of this document that you wish to be Confirmed then you will be invited to join in a process of study, commitment and involvement in the life of this parish. It is to be hoped that both St Joseph's and yourselves will become **thoroughly enriched** by embarking on this adventure.

Here is an interesting story. There was once a boy whose behaviour in school was dreadful. His teacher tried everything to get him to change. She encouraged him, she helped him, she reprimanded him, she even threatened him. His parents were asked to intervene and the headmaster was also involved. But nothing seemed to work. Eventually his teacher was at her wits end. 'Tommy' she said 'I am at my wits end. I have tried everything to help you but your behaviour is still dreadful. Why are you being like this?' 'Miss' replied the boy '**Inside me there are two wild dogs**. A good dog and a bad dog. It depends which I feed the most.' The Gift of Confirmation is intended to help you in the process, a process in which you can take another step to become fully alive and fully human.

Things to do:

1. What happens to a society that is fed on a diet of **junk** food, **junk** TV, **junk** morals, **junk** values?
2. Celebrities have become the new **'gods'**. We fall down and worship them. We want to be like them. Who are the big celebrities nowadays, and why are they so admired?
3. What do you think are your **best qualities**?
4. **What** do you hope to be when you grow up?
5. **What** are the things in life that give you most joy?
6. **What** are the things in life that cause you most hurt and disappointment?
7. Is there **anyone** in life you really admire? Why?
8. **Listen** to what the prophet Jeremiah has to say: 'I know the plans I have for you' says the Lord. 'Plans for good not plans for evil when you come to me with all your heart.'

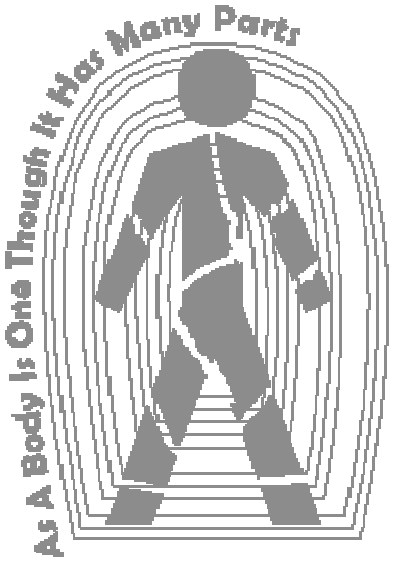
Almighty God and His Church wants **nothing but the best for you**. That is why your **schooling** is so important. God and His Church want you to develop as a mature, well rounded, articulate, confident person. They want you to be capable of recognising and using the many gifts and academic abilities that are inside of you. Almighty God and His Church wants your **home life** to be happy, life giving and extremely affirming. The Lord wants your family to be a source of passion, affection and companionship. Modern family life is under a lot of pressure these days. Yet it is the place if we are blessed where we can become most like God Himself. Your brothers and sisters, your mother and father, might occasionally get on your nerves but as we get older we can often realise how incredibly precious they are. They are the ones who can make you feel **really real**.

It is sometimes said that large numbers of people have **lost a grip on reality**. They have become obsessed with so called reality television and the celebrity culture we live in. For many of them life is not actually lived in the real world but in the unrealities of such programmes as 'Big Brother' and celebrity television with all of its values. But do not be fooled. Learn to develop a wise sense of perspective about the present. Learn to discern the **quality values** that last rather than the trashy values that are here today and gone tomorrow. Don't be seduced by those things which seem convenient, easy, popular. Learn to discern treasure that lasts forever. So often these are not convenient, easy or popular. **Be a first rate version of yourself rather than a second rate version of somebody else**. Your life stretches before you and it is a life of value.

What is the matter with kids today?

A great deal is being said about **young people** these days. Some of it is wonderful and every congratulation needs to be given to the thousands of young people in our country who are a credit to their families and to themselves. But there is a great deal that is very worrying. We have become aware of the increase of what is simply called **'yob' culture**. Our towns and cities seem to be plagued by groups of the young (and the not so young) whose behaviour brings misery to ordinary people and shame to themselves. Vandalism, graffiti, violence and a growing sense of disrespect fuelled by binge drinking, drugs, violent films and videos has painted an image of our country that we are far from proud of.

A new breed of young person has evolved. They are described as **'feral'**. This word is very precise. It means savage, merciless, wild, uncontrollable, violent. Many of these young people come from backgrounds where the family unit has broken up and people struggle to live and find any sort of moral direction or encouragement. Young people need good **role models**. Whenever these are absent it is very possible that other types of role model will fill the vacuum. It would seem that such role models are able to cultivate poor attitudes and poor behaviour in the lives of many young people.



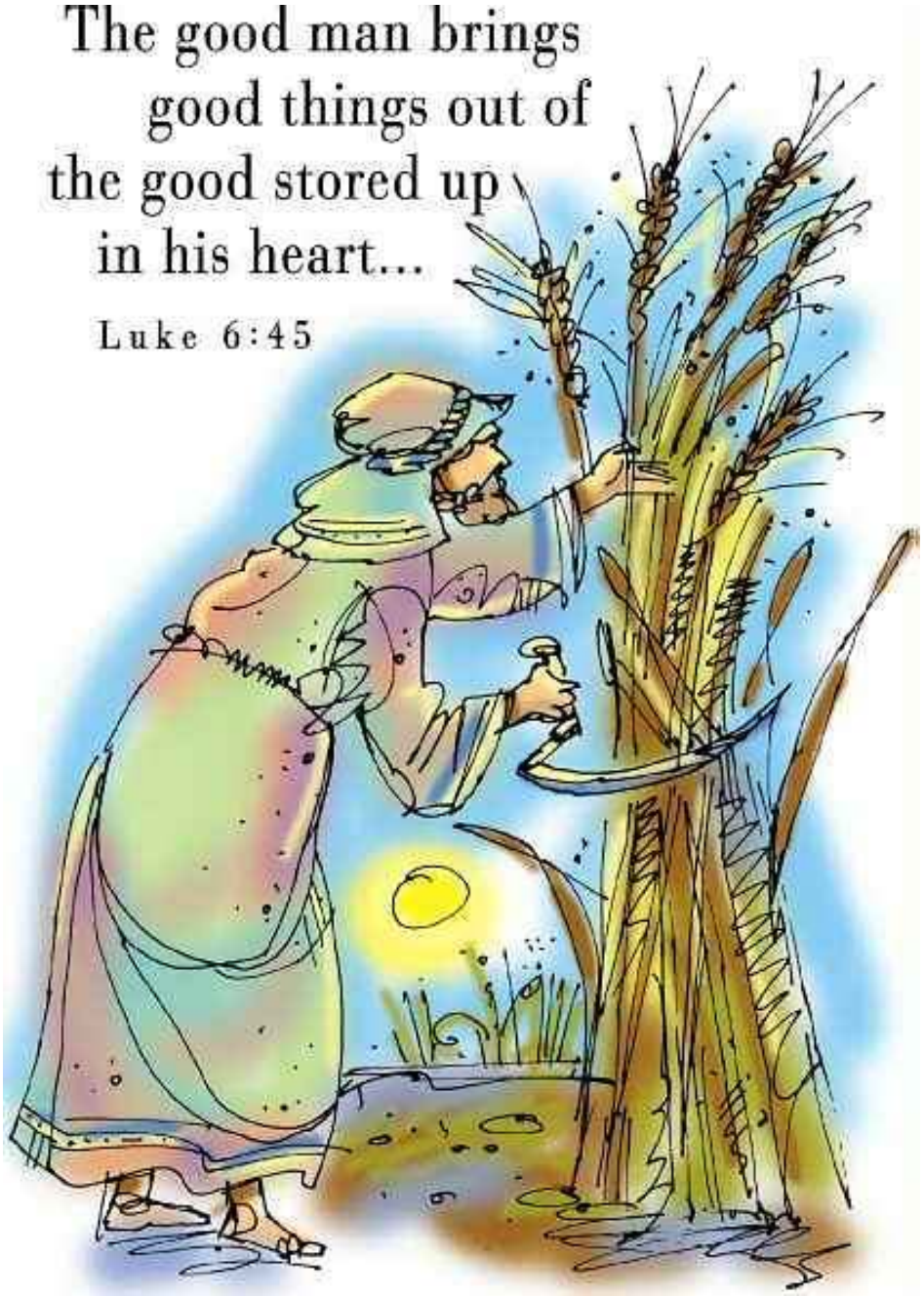
In more recent times we have seen the steady growth of crimes of violence where knives and guns have been used. These are increasingly used to win respect and enforce authority. Too many people have fallen victim to senseless acts of brutality and bravado. Rhys Jones, James Bulger, Stephen Lawrence, Demiloila Taylor. These are just a few names. **Such tragedies affect everyone**. There is the unfortunate victim as well as their family who are scarred for life. There is the neighbourhood that becomes associated with a tragic senseless death. But there is also the perpetrator of the act.

In real life all actions have consequences. There is no escaping that. The choices can affect us forever. Youth is a quality often associated with hope and promise. For many it is an experience of anger and violence, hopelessness, lack of self worth. A young person who has taken the life of another or who has been involved in a savage act of violence has to carry the consequences of that action forever.

It is never the will of Almighty God that any of His children should experience lives that are empty and meaningless. He created us in His own image and likeness to blossom and mature to the best of our potential. God wants the best for us. Perhaps He is not so much angry at the current situation in our nation as disappointed and a little sad at the senselessness of it all. We need to be prepared to invite God into our lives if we are to become the persons that we are capable of becoming. **But we need all the help we can get**. This is where the Sacraments of the Church come in.

What is your relationship with yourself?

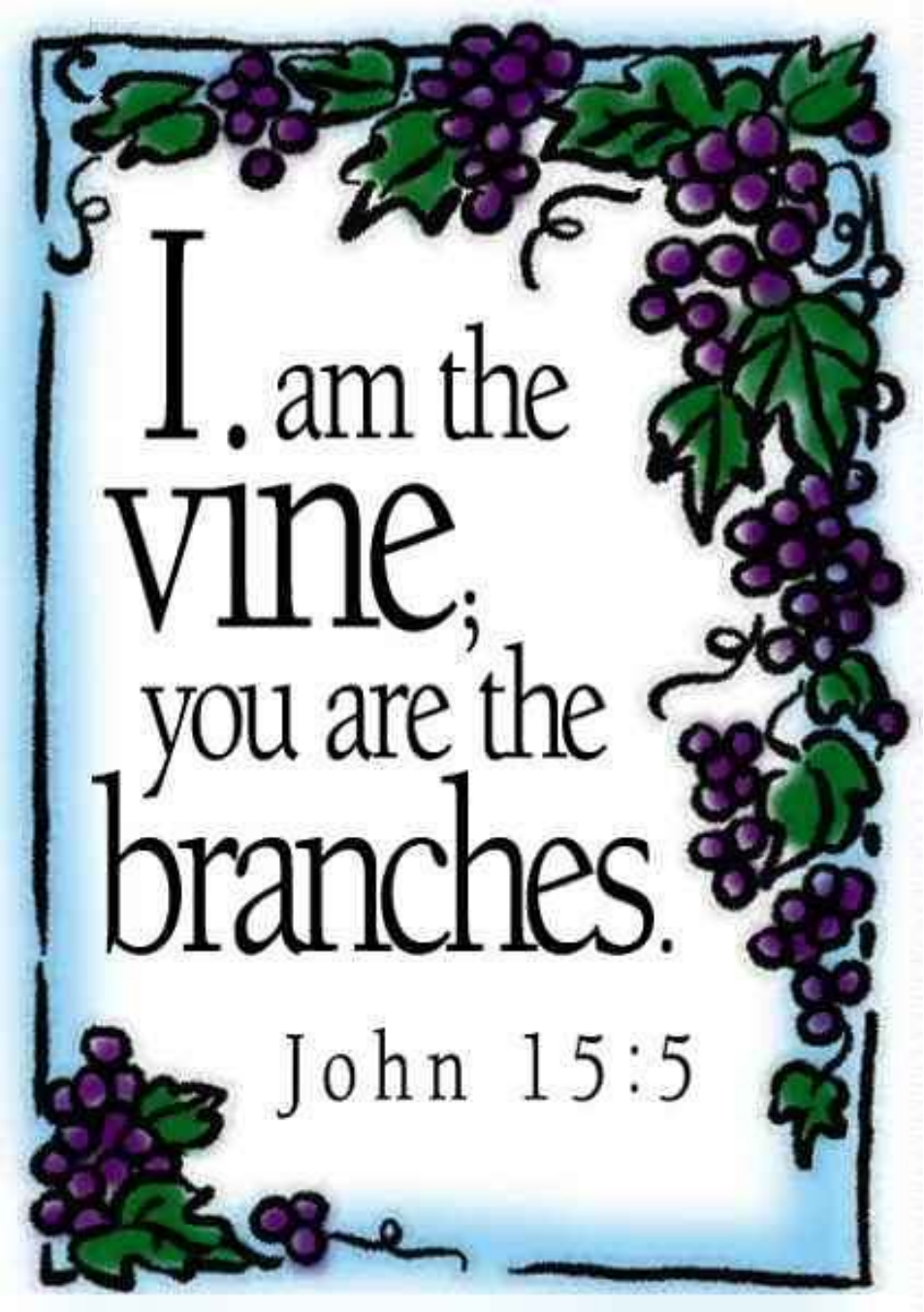
It is not always easy being **a young person**. There can be a lot of pressures and it all makes things rather confusing. Sometimes life at home can get on top of us. Life at school has its pressures and then there can be all that stuff with friends. Our bodies as well as our minds go through all sorts of changes. That can make things difficult. People talk a lot about **peer pressure** nowadays. It is a type of pressure that says you have to dress in a particular way, think in a particular way, act in a particular way. Sometimes being your own person can make you very unpopular and self conscious. We would rather not feel left out. Its only as we grow older that we begin to grow in experience and with experience comes **confidence**. When we are confident our lives can often change for the better but it all takes time. Somebody once said that youth was wasted on young people! When we are young we are energetic, idealistic and anxious to do well. However we lack experience. Then as we get older and more experienced we begin to lose the energy, the idealism, and the ambition to do well. However here is a piece of wisdom that is worth keeping in mind: It is better to be a first rate version of yourself than a second rate version of somebody else. **That is a very good reason for getting Confirmed**.



The Sacraments of the Church put us in touch with the **Divine**. The Sacraments of the Church are packed with God's energy. The Sacraments of the Church are there for us. The Sacraments of the Church are God's pledge to His people that He will help them to become fully alive and fully human. In the difficulties and the challenges of modern living young people are faced by intense pressures. The Sacraments of the Church are there to help us steer through those experiences that can be confusing and dangerous. **The Sacraments are good**.

Confirmation is **a wonderful gift of the Church** to help her beloved children to find the best in themselves. Confirmation is packed with a rich prize called **'Grace'**. It is the life of God. In particular it is the life of the Holy Spirit the third person of the Blessed Trinity. It will be possible at Confirmation to receive seven gifts from the Holy Spirit. They will help us to live to the best of our potential as people. They will help us to realise what is the difference between right and wrong. They will help us to become courageous when it is not cool to be courageous. They will help us to discern and to reverence the sacred in us when there is so much around us that is far from sacred or reverent. They will help us to be filled with a sense of awe and wonder in the knowledge that God is with us in the amazing adventure called **'Life'**.

Let us now give a little thought to one or two important matters. In particular let us examine the whole idea of **'Relationships'**. We spend our lives in relationships of one kind or another.



Things to do:

1. It is **not cool** to be seen at Mass. The 'not going' has become a badge of belonging. Is it possible to study for Confirmation and not be actively involved in your parish by going to Mass?
2. The Sacraments of the Church must be about **real life and real living**. They are not an oasis from life or one off celebrations that are **'nice'**. How often have you been to confession since your First Confession? How often have you been to Holy Communion since your First Holy Communion?
3. When Mum and Dad brought you for Baptism they publicly undertook to bring you up in **the practice of faith**. Ask them how they have managed to do this in practical terms throughout your life?
4. Ask Mum and Dad whether or not they regard themselves as **generous, committed members** of the parish community. Ask them what are the practical ways they support the parish of St Joseph's. Ask your Mum and Dad what are the aspects of parish life that give them the most joy.
5. You have become **a citizen** of the Catholic Church following your Baptism. Ask yourself whether or not you think you are a good member of the Catholic Church.
6. A stranger from **Mars** has landed in your front room. He wants to know why you are going to make your Confirmation. **Give him four reasons**.
7. Think about this. There is something rather odd about a society that thinks that **Elvis** is alive and God is dead!

Christian Churches of all denominations were regarded as places where **authority** was experienced and respected. Nowadays authority is not respected in the way it was in the past. People wish to choose their own beliefs. They do not like churchmen telling them what they should or should not do. This can be seen in such things as sexual ethics, divorce, remarriage and same sex relationships.

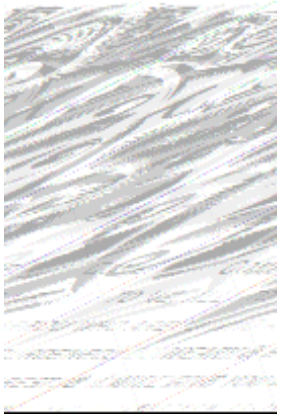
Christian Churches of all denominations tried to foster within their people **a love for the institution of the Church**. Particularly in times of poverty the church was seen as the defender and supporter of the poor. So many people looked to their churches for both spiritual and social support. Nowadays that love for the institution of the Church does not exist. It is seen as outmoded. The portrayal of priests and nuns as well as church people is often carried out in a negative and cynical way. Religious people are often seen as **slightly irrational** and although their views might be tolerated in their private lives they are seen as having no place in public life. The secular culture of the age encourages us to be more independent and in control of our lives. The notion of dependence upon God and commitment to a religious group is **not encouraged**.

Christian Churches of all denominations tried their best to preach the Gospel of **God's love and respect**. However churches as well as other religious groups are often seen as the causes of hatred and violence and religious wars. Examples abound: the crusades, the European religious wars, the reformation, Northern Ireland, Islamic extremism. In an effort to dissociate themselves from these things people either abandon religion or pick and choose what they want rather like being in a **supermarket**.

What is your relationship with God?

Many years ago a man called **Augustine** lived in a town called Hippo in North Africa. Augustine was a bit of a lad. However he converted to Christianity and eventually became a Bishop of the young Christian Church that was beginning to flourish in the latter stages of the Roman Empire. Augustine had a brain the size of a small planet. To this day his writings are amongst the most sophisticated insights that were ever written. He became Saint Augustine. It is a name that ranks amongst the greatest heroes in the story of Christianity.

Augustine wrote these words **'You have made us for yourself O Lord and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.'** He believed that we human beings are restless creatures. We are never totally satisfied with life. We get bored, fed up, distracted. No matter what we are doing, where we are living or who we are with, we are still restless. There is still a desire for something else. Very often we do not know what it is. On one occasion a young Mum was demented by the behaviour of her son. It was summer holiday time and the child was just bored to death. 'Jack' she said 'Why are you being like this? What do you really want? Tell me!' The child replied 'Mum I don't know what I want.' Augustine maintained that the root of our restlessness was the desire to return to God. **That is where our ultimate destiny is**.



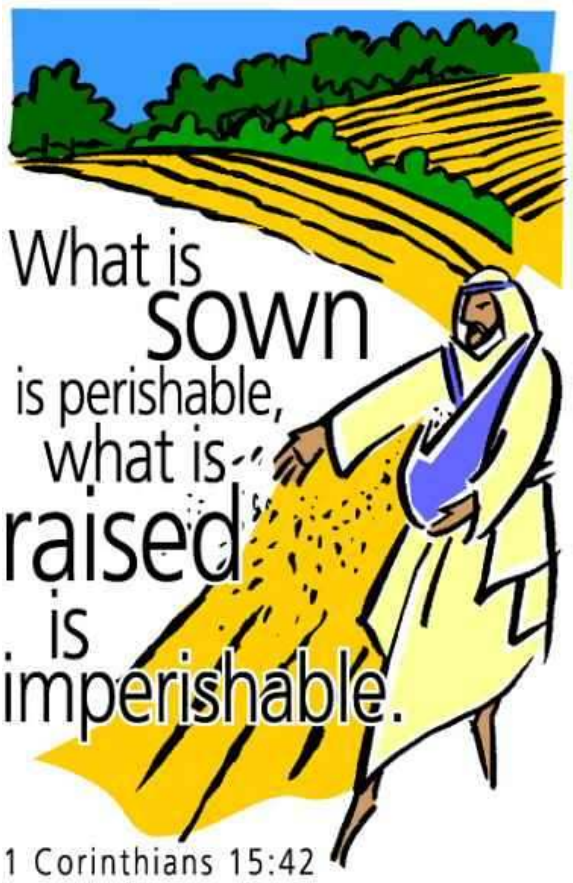
The age in which we live is sometimes described as a **'post Christian age'**. Christianity seems to be on the decline and the great Christian Principles that motivated and guided Europe's people for hundreds of years are not regarded as important as they used to be. Our culture has become very **secular**. God has been moved to the sidelines. Strangely enough it seems that large numbers of people still believe in God but the question has to be asked **'What type of God?'** Is it the personal God revealed in the Holy Bible? Is He a kind of star wars God? Is He the cuddly toy God or the vindictive cruel and distant God? Is He the God of the yellow pages we turn to when we want something? Is He some old fellow in the sky with a beard who has no interest in us? Is God just a fairy tale for children who is as relevant as the tooth fairy, Santa Claus and Father Christmas?

Our **'post Christian age'** wants proofs of the existence of God. Sometimes these are rather difficult to present. You cannot find God at the end of a telescope or conjure him up like something from **Harry Potter**. What you can find however are His witnesses. These are people who have met Him, spoke with Him, ate with Him, conversed with Him in that habit that is called prayer. For them God is certainly not a myth. He is a reality that surrounds them, supports them, encourages them, heals them. In particular their understanding of Almighty God becomes even greater when they have made a close personal relationship with **Jesus Christ the Son of God**. Jesus Christ is recognised by millions as the Son of Almighty God who walked upon this earth. He was born in a specific time, in a specific country, in a specific family. He did not come to solve all the problems of life. He came however to fill the gaps with His presence and to stay with us until the end of time.

Christian Churches of all denominations were expected to guide people in the **ways of God**. Nowadays people do not necessarily believe in God. If they do believe in God, He has very little to do with their lives. The church becomes irrelevant to them. 'I don't see myself as a religious person. I see myself as a spiritual person. So I don't have to go to church to believe in God. I can make up my own religion as I go along. It's as good as yours anyway.'

Christian Churches of all denominations were regarded as the guardians and teachers of **moral codes**. Sometimes these were called moral absolutes. Nowadays people do not believe in moral absolutes. They believe in personal choice, majority decisions, popular voting. 'My opinions are as good as yours.' 'That might be okay for you but it is not okay for me.' 'You believe this but I believe that. I can make my own choices. '

Christian Churches of all denominations regarded themselves as the teachers of ancient **sacred stories and traditions**. These stories and traditions were passed down to successive generations. Nowadays people don't want to know these stories. They want to tell their own stories. Notice how often secular music and literature is used at funerals and weddings.



What is your relationship with your parish?

The **'post Christian'** world in which we live has seen a massive change in people's attitudes towards the church and the practice of religion. Increasing numbers of people have little connection with a religion of any denomination and their understanding of faith and religious practice is often minimal. For instance a little boy was given a part in his school's Nativity Play but wanted to know why the baby was named after some **swear words**.

Jesus Christ continued to reveal the mystery of God to us and to invite us to enter into close personal relationships with God. In our **secular age** there are a thousand and one things that will present themselves to us as attractive and convincing. Many of them will capture our hearts like false gods do. But in the end they disappear for they do not satisfy us: You have made us for yourself O Lord and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You. Candidates for Confirmation need to examine their relationship between themselves and Almighty God.

Things to do:

1. The Holy Bible contains the story of God's mysterious relationship with an ancient people who were **transformed** from a pack of gypsy nomads to a nation who believed that they were the chosen ones of God. Read this story. It is one of their sacred hymns called Psalm 138.

O Lord, you search me and you know me,
you know my resting and my rising,
you discern my purpose from afar.
You mark when I walk or lie down,
all my ways lie open to you.

Before ever a word is on my tongue
you know it, O Lord, through and through.
Behind and before you besiege me,
your hand ever laid upon me.
Too wonderful for me, this knowledge,
too high, beyond my reach.

O where can I go from your spirit,
or where can I flee from your face?
If I climb the heavens, you are there.
If I lie in the grave, you are there.

For it was you who created my being,
knit me together in my mother's womb.
I thank you for the wonder of my being,
for the wonders of all your creation.

2. The writer **G K Chesterton** once said when the people stop believing in God it is not that they will believe in nothing they will believe in **anything**. We find nowadays there is a huge increase in interest in astrology, tarot cards, spiritualist, new age religions and a growing fascination with ancient celtic, eastern and pagan religions. Even rosary beads are now seen as some sort of lucky charm. Ask your mum and dad if they believe in God or not.
3. During the **last week** how much time do you think you have given to giving God thanks or praise or worship simply because He is God, the Lord of all creation and the source of life?
4. You can tell a lot about a person by **the symbols** that surround them. In your room what sort of symbols do you have? It might be a picture of a footballer , a pop star, someone from television. How many symbols of the things of God are in your home? If a stranger came would he find a crucifix, a copy of the bible, a statue or a picture of the Blessed Virgin?
5. In your **home** are any prayers said as a family? Which ones?
6. Has your **home** ever been blessed by a priest? Ask your Mum and Dad.
7. If it was **a crime** to believe in God would there be enough evidence to convict you? Have a think for a few minutes.
8. **Prayer** is the raising up of the heart and mind to God. It can take place in the simplest of ways and in the busiest of places. How many times a day do you do this?
9. Would you say there are any **false gods** in your life, people or things that you consider to be more important than God? Be honest with yourself.