



## **Parish of the Nativity of the Lord**

### **Book+Circle - September 2021**

We had a lovely Book+Circle, catching up after the summer holidays and we had time to discuss 2 books that we had read since the last meeting

- The Abbey by Fr James Martin SJ AND Eager to Love by Richard Rohr

#### **Book 1: The Abbey**

This is a novel about how God works in our lives. The story is set around an Abbey in Pennsylvania, but it could be anywhere, and there are 3 main characters: Anne a divorced single mother whose teenage son died, Mark a handyman at the Abbey and Fr Paul the Abbot. The novel shows us the surprising power of God in bringing healing and wholeness to our lives. The author, Fr James Martin is a Jesuit priest

#### **How did the book make us feel?**

What a lovely book to read and particularly suited to a summer holiday read! It was very readable and as the Tablet Reviewer suggested – *unputdownable*. The storyline was very plausible, we could all relate to the different characters and sympathise with their pains and concerns and with the joys they went through. The Abbot and older priest in the story were thoughtful and helped pose questions to Anne and Mark that the reader too could reflect on. The book deals with a deep issue sensitively and without dogmatism. It was a book full of hope and speaks to the reader in different ways depending on where they are on their own personal spiritual journey.

#### **What did the group think were the book's main strengths?**

This was a book that was well structured, was easy to pick up, put down and then carry on. The language was relaxed. It felt witty, engaging and a comforting read. We all felt that the story was more than the simple book title suggested, in a positive way. We felt great empathy for all the characters. We liked some of the suggestions made by the Abbot about dealing with difficulties, particularly when Anne decides to write a letter to God about how she is feeling – we could all imagine starting and restarting such a letter. The storyline is like a journey of discovery.

#### **And what were the book's main weaknesses?**

The only weakness of the book was that it was too short, the reader finished wanting more! One reader thought that whilst the book concentrates on Anne's journey into understanding, Mark's journey is only briefly sketched and Fr. Paul has arrived, with occasional reflections on how he got there, so found there was limited interaction between the participants

#### **Would we read another book written by the same author?**

We all agreed we would enjoy reading more books by this author. We have read a couple of his other books and have some suggestions for a later read such as *My Life with the Saints*

#### **Would we recommend this book to someone else?**

We would recommend this to anyone who enjoys a short, fiction book. And perhaps to people we know who have had a tragedy in their lives. A couple of us have already lent the book to others.

## **Book 2: Eager to Love**

This is an in-depth view of a well-known, beloved Christian saint, that Richard Rohr brings to life in a different and refreshing way. Saint Francis of Assisi is not only associated with a truly practical theology and a mystical way of relating to God's creation, he is also Founder-friar of the Franciscan movement to which Richard Rohr himself has belonged for over 50 years. The reader therefore gets a strong feeling that this book is written with an insider's eye, an appreciation for history and a determination to root St Francis in reality. It shows the reader the Saint behind the legends and the truth sitting side by side with myth.

### **How did the book make us feel?**

We all recognised that this is a book that demands focussed attention and savouring in small chunks at a time because of its depth. Most of us had only managed to get through half of the book before the meeting and all agreed it needed time to digest. It made most of us feel that we struggle to have the depth of knowledge required to follow through all the thoughts and notes made by Rohr, a little unsettling for us, but his experience and detailed thinking shines through the book

### **What did the group think were the book's main strengths?**

This is a book full of wisdom and logic. We really enjoyed the philosophy behind much of the commentary. The fact that *we can only do what we can do* and to leave our worries to God. That we should *live simply so others can simply live*. The importance to *focus on others not on ourselves* are all such important messages. The messages from the book are both challenging, inspiring and positively helpful in current times – where a lot of advertising messages are centred around 'because you are worth it'

We all agreed too that this book brings St Francis to life and helped us to understand why Pope Francis chose this Saint and his philosophy. Pope Francis told thousands of journalists March 16 that he chose to be called after St. Francis of Assisi, "the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation," the same created world "with which we don't have such a good relationship." This philosophy comes through Richard Rohr's book

### **And what were the book's main weaknesses?**

We all felt that the book is very well written but we hadn't allowed ourselves enough time to read and digest the thinking behind the words. It is a profound read and needs to be read slowly.

### **Would we read another book written by the same author?**

Yes, Richard Rohr is a really good author but we agreed that it would be important to try and finish this book before tackling another. And if we were to recommend the book to anyone else we thought they would need time and some level of understanding of Rohr's approach. This is not an 'entry level' book – the book benefits from Rohr's depth of understanding having entered the Franciscans in 1961 and this book is written in 2014 so over 50 years of experience

### **Next book: Love unveiled – Edward Sri**

**Next meeting – note change of date** : Monday 1 November @ 8.00pm in home (location on email)