

Cursillos in Christianity

Cursillo (pronounced kur-see-yo) is a Spanish word meaning “short course”. It begins on a Thursday evening and ends Sunday evening. During those three days the Cursillistas (those attending the weekend) live and work together, listening to talks given by deacons and laypeople. They also attend Mass, receive Communion and visit the Blessed Sacrament daily.

The deacon, who is the “spiritual director” and the laity who make up the Cursillo team spend weeks working and praying together in preparation for the weekend. The Cursillo takes careful planning because the time is short and the subject extensive. The titles of the talks indicate their content: Ideal, Sanctifying Grace, Laypeople in the Church, Actual Grace, Piety, Study, The Sacraments, Action, Obstacles to Grace, Leaders Study of the Environment, Life in Grace, Community in Action and Perseverance.

Not A Retreat

A Cursillo can be made only once in a lifetime; therefore it is not a substitute for a retreat. Actually the Cursillo makes succeeding retreats more profitable and Cursillistas are encouraged to make regular retreats. The basic atmosphere of a Cursillo differs greatly from the individual solitude of a retreat. The Cursillo weekend is not silent. The teachings of Christ are experienced and shared in a climate of joy and a spirit of community. During the talks the Cursillistas take notes and each talk is followed by a discussion period within a small group.

Instrument of Renewal

The Cursillo is a powerful instrument of renewal in the Church. Its aim is to concentrate closely on the Person and teachings of Jesus Christ. The Cursillo gives those who attend a living understanding of basic Christian truths and desire to serve the Church. What’s more it provides a means to continue the Christian formation which is just begun in the three-day weekend.

The Fourth Day

The after activity of the Cursillo is known as the “fourth day”, that is the balance of the Cursillistas life on earth. During this time perseverance is important just as in any method of renewal. In the Cursillo Movement, the community spirit is continued after the three day weekend through the “Ultreyas” or reunions of the community. These are available as a means of growth in understanding and zeal within the Christian community.

Smaller groups of friends also come together regularly to encourage and support one another in spiritual growth and the Christian apostolate.

History of Cursillo

The movement began in 1944 on the island of Majorca, birthplace of Father Junipero Serra. Under leadership of a Spanish layman, Eduardo Bonnín, a group of some 30 priests and laymen met to organize some means of countering immorality and indifference to religion. The Bishop of Majorca, Juan Hervás, suggested the program that was finally developed carefully into the Cursillo. The first Cursillo took place in the United States in 1957. Two Spanish Air Force pilots who were training with the US Air Force in Texas originated it.

The Church and Cursillo

The Cursillo movement was given Church approval in December 1963. On that occasion, Pope Paul VI said in part: -“This method of Christian teaching commonly called Cursillos in Christianity extends already over a great number of the faithful and it has produced abundant Christian renewal of family life...and the vitalization of parishes.”

In March of 1971, after making his Cursillo weekend, then Archbishop Timothy Manning was quoted in the Tidings as saying, “From my experience, I must say this has my 100% plus...not only approval but enthusiasm.”

Christianizing Environments

The Cursillo is an encounter with Christ. Correctly applied and overseen, the Cursillo Movement can have very positive results in the spiritual revitalization of the world. The Christ-likeness in a few people is contagious. The transference of Christ’s values to others in one’s family, school, place of business, etc., is the Christianizing of environments the Cursillo promotes. The goal of the movement is that Christ be the prime influence in society. So it is said the PRIMARY OBJECTIVES of the Cursillo Movement are to develop in adult Christians a consciousness of their ability and mission to become leaders in the work of Christian renewal, and to sustain them as they provide a Christian leaven in civic, social and economic life. This “Christianizing of environments” is what the Cursillo movement is about.