

The insight of faith

There are many things that can cause us to question and ultimately turn us away from our faith; a disastrous marriage, a tragic bereavement, a natural disaster, a shocking revelation affecting the Church. All of these and many, many more, whilst they may or may not encompass uniquely personal situations, will nevertheless direct our mind to the most fundamental of questions about meaning and purpose. When such events happen we often feel that our faith fails to deliver the answers we are looking for, only leaving us with further questions. The challenge that such events pose to faith isn't one which leaves faith and its response floundering, but one in which faith offers a truth to understanding what has happened so that our human values of trust, love and goodness remain intact. I think that when such situations arise, it is only by turning to Jesus that we experience our faith in God as meeting the existential quality of the human spirit that was alive in him, and thus allowing access to a glimpse of the transcendent to help us in our need.

Our gospel today calls on us to be dressed for action and for us to have our lamps lit. Its is only if we have lived through some of these questioning moments that we are able to know what Jesus is saying. The challenge that faith asks of us is that we carry with us this potential to be undone. As such we must see our faith in Jesus and in the God of love as part and parcel of who we are. Carrying this understanding functions so as to offer us the real human experience of the one who took upon himself human tragedy in all its manifold ways in order to show us the pathway through such events.

The aftermath of his death was not the dismantling of all that he taught but rather the flowering of a new relationship with him through his resurrection. The fact that this moment of revelation only comes following the fact of death affirms what a powerful connection our faith asks of us. That the disciples meet and yet fail to recognise the Risen Christ emphasises just how real the doubts can become. In the face of all these moments of crisis and tragedy, in the face of all these moments of seeming death-like annihilation in our lives, we too unknowingly encounter the risen Christ and it is only when we ask our faith to give meaning and purpose to these moments, do we recognise the Risen Christ amongst us. For the disciples it was a spoken word, a linen cloth, a piece of broken bread, for us it may be something utterly different: the coming together of friends, the realisation of our own selfishness, or the acceptance of a flawed character. Whatever or however it occurs, within this moment of recognition, there comes to us the insight which faith grants.

None of this is easy to comprehend as sadly the events themselves cannot be undone and the damage may well last for many years. As Jesus says you can't really barricade yourself against these events but at least you can make preparation for them. If your faith gives you insight into the meaning and purpose of your life then whenever or however these difficulties arise they will not distance you from Christ but bring you closer to him and that can only be good. Good because in the human tragedy of the mess of our own mistakes, we will meet the one who actually chose to go there with us, to bring us home and to sit us down at table and to wait on us.