

Pro-Cathedral / Donnybrook
4 July 2021

Introduction

Andrew Greeley was an American priest, sociologist and novelist. He once said that his Irish background helped him to understand today's Gospel: begrudgery. If you look it up in the dictionary, it says "noun, mainly Irish." We do recognise it: local boy makes good; other locals not happy.

Topic

Greeley's comment takes us some of the way into today's Gospel story. Blocks to faith do exist today but in different forms.

Steps

I could start with a list: the widening gap between culture and the Gospel; the scandals in the institutional church; evangelical atheism, promoted as a kind of alternative faith. There is also a curious mix of familiarity and ignorance. A young student was asked after thirteen years of Catholic education if she could name the four Gospels. She said, yes. John. Paul – not a gospel writer but he did preach the gospel. Then she said Ringo, followed by "Oh no, that's the Beatles." The level of basic information "out there" is low.

So far, so familiar. There is more. For those of us within the faith, there could be nothing more engaging or fulfilling. But let's not forget that for others, the whole Christian claim is simply unbelievable – literally too good to be true. We proclaim God, a God of love, who has chosen to disclose himself known gradually, starting with the people of Israel. This revelation reached its climax in a single human life, Jesus of Nazareth, especially in his death and resurrection. Then followed the great outpouring of the Spirit. Obvious to believers, but it is a lot to take in and a lot to take on board.

If it is true, then it is simply wonderful – worth everything, all that I am. If it is true, then life is suddenly illuminated – we see the deeper, everlasting purpose of existence, goodness and love.

And, of course, there are other blocks which are personal – to do with my own story and my own hesitations. So, in a way, we can understand the resistance in Nazareth.

Conclusion

So, what does it take to wake up to the Gospel and become an intentional disciple? First of all, we have to hear the yes of God to us all and to me personally. St Paul puts it like this:

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not "Yes and No"; but in him it is always "Yes." For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." For this reason it is through him that we say the "Amen," to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 1:19-20)

We have to have the courage to let ourselves hear this yes – yes to your life, your loves, your goodness, your hopes. The “yes” of God should evoke a “yes” in ourselves – it calls for an open heart, a willingness to engage. No one can do this for us – not the greatest saint – we each have to do this on our own account. RS Thomas’s poem, *The Kingdom*, closes with these words:

It’s a long way off, but to get
There takes no time and admission
Is free, if you purge yourself
Of desire, and present yourself with
Your need only and the simple offering
Of your faith, green as a leaf.

Precisely!