

Pro-Cathedral / Donnybrook

21/22 August 2021

Welcome

As we all know, the faith is in crisis in our times. By faith, I mean not just the “church” but the Christian project as such. People have indeed walked away, a process accelerated by the pandemic. The current fuss about first communions is a fuss about a cultural left-over of long vanished convictions. Much of this is understandable, given the recent and not so recent history. For us, however, as “remainers”, the Gospel today is very direct: will you also go away? A second question is implied: and if not, why not?

Topic

I would like first of all to speak personally and then more generally.

Steps

With all the ups and downs of faith and church and life, my own fascination with and faith in the person of Jesus has been a constant. Who was he? What did he teach? What happened for us in his death and resurrection? Of course, over time and with greater familiarity with the New Testament, my faith in Jesus has evolved and changed and is still growing. Especially, my appreciation of what happened for us in his death and resurrection has evolved considerably.

The starting point for me is who are we as human beings? We all wonder, where did we come from, what the meaning of life, where are we headed, how should we live? Atheist or believer, eventually we all have to ask the God question. A great theologian of the Second Vatican Council put it like this: we are all “hearers of the Word,” that is, simply as human beings, we listen out for the possibility of a mysterious someone at the heart of it all.

Once we affirm God, then we wonder will the Mystery relate to us? In our Christian faith, we go a good deal further: God has indeed disclosed God’s self first of all in all creation and in the still small voice of conscience. Mysteriously yet wisely, God went further and disclosed God’s self, in history, through the people of Israel and finally to all humanity in Jesus from Nazareth.

Personally, I stand by the classical creed of the Christian tradition: he is truly God and truly human. This is not so easy to understand and we could always ask, why would that be so significant? For this reason. One the strongest objections to God is the fact of evil – of all kinds, natural disasters, horrible diseases, injustice and simply the things some humans do to others. How is it possible to be aware of all that and still trust in a loving God? The Christian response is unique among world religions. We believe that God has loved us so much that in Jesus, the Son of God, God has entered our human condition, , as the Son of Man, to share with us our darkness and brokenness, so as to speak words of compassion and love to us *from within*. Against the common tradition, the cross is not a punishment or worse a payment. Instead, it is strangely and even paradoxically a word

of mercy and love, a word compassion and solidarity. This is still not an answer, of course, but it does mean that it is not unreasonable to stay faithful so loving a God.

There is always more to be said. One of the great challenges of our day is to integrate our Christian faith narrative with the emerging scientific story of the universe, 13.8 billion years old. Many writers now talk about the cosmic Christ. Such thinkers are inspired by the letter to the Colossians, where we read these thrilling, baffling and appealing words:

[Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15-17)

Potentially, such reflections offer us a fabulous vision, bringing together the Big Bang and the Word made flesh. As Teilhard de Chardin put it, "there is something wonderful afoot in the universe." So in Jesus, we have a spiritual guide, a teacher of happiness, a moral compass. We have also a word from God of astonishing, breath-taking, cosmic love.

Conclusion

It is now some years since I came across the contemporary Christian Creed from the Methodist tradition. If you don't mind, I'll recite it now in place of our own usual Creed.

We believe in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, power and love, whose mercy is over all his works, and whose will is ever directed to his children's good.

We believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of man, the gift of the Father's unfailing grace, the ground of our hope, and the promise of our deliverance from sin and death.

We believe in the Holy Spirit as the divine presence in our lives, whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance of the truth of Christ, and find strength and help in time of need.

We believe that this faith should manifest itself in the service of love as set forth in the example of our blessed Lord, to the end that the kingdom of God may come upon the earth. Amen.

For these reasons, I won't be walking away any day soon! Like Peter, I have come to know and believe, he is the Holy One of God.