

Isolation Radio Talk

Search for one equal light

Good Morning

Another time I will argue whether God exists or not. Today I assume among many of you there is a rumour that God is very much alive; that the possibility of God exists. Yes, I know you move from certainty to uncertainty and back again. I dare to believe among women and men the world over; different races and cultures; different nations and languages; different faiths and indeed none; insofar that the statement 'if there is no God there are no atheists', is true, there is a longing for God. I suppose also that some will go down blind alleys looking for God and will be harmed doing so.

In a book written about the 1948-1950 wartime struggles on the border between India and Burma, one's imagination is caught by the account of men in conditions of extreme heat, danger, and mal-nourishment. They went in fear of the enemy, leeches, mosquitoes. They climbed steep jungle slopes only to discover, when they reached the top, they faced yet another valley; another slope. The joy and relief when at last they see below them the river, beyond which was safety, sprang out from the printed words.

Such is an allegory of a life's journey. The scriptures tell the story of God's love and relationship with his people; through the scriptures, possibility and hope are always before you; faith is quickened; imagination captures images of the promised land - the kingdom that is to come.

A life of faith is not an unmitigated struggle from the cradle to the grave; far from it; there are times of wonderful insight; times of growing in understanding; bursts of light; spiritual awareness. True, they often come in times of difficulty, conflict, or sorrow; then, you have struggled. They come too in times of celebration and joy, a marriage, a birth, a new home, a new job. G. K. Chesterton, writer, theologian, called them 'collisions'; I really like that idea. Those special moments, you neither choose nor predict, mean you will transform; will let go; move on. You break down past prejudice to break out, or break through, to new pastures. The going is hard; that is the teaching of the Cross. The Cross is a signpost for travellers on the road; it points the way to go.

To speak the Christian life as a journey is commonplace. The road you travel is conditioned by your present culture. Not for you the total uncertainty of an Abraham or a Livingstone; in different ages they set out into the unknown not knowing what lay ahead. For Abraham it was at the direct command of God; for David Livingstone, explorer, and missionary, in 19th Century Africa, because the record is more complete, motives appear more complex. In the age of the soundbite, the instant opinion, mass movement, mass opinion, you expect instant answers; hope for neat solutions. Which of you does not hope for a simple answer to a complex and difficult question?

When the foundations tremble, the temptation to hold on, to cling to whatever seems to be firm, is almost irresistible. That 'firmness' nearly always too, comes to us from the past. For the faithful Christian it may be a version or an interpretation of Holy Scripture; it may be in the repetition of time-honoured words, words over which many tears have been shed.

Most of us have opinions but fewer have the knowledge to speak with authority. When you say the Apostles Creed that begins 'I believe in God, the Father Almighty', you know the words have come to us from centuries past; in their time, disagreement about them moved armies across the face of Europe. That is an illustration of the baggage you carry on your journey; there is no promise that the journey of faith will be an easy one, neither in Holy Scripture nor by the Church.

St Teresa of Avila, from the 16th century was a tough saint. Once when crossing a particularly tempestuous river and having lost the load of some of the pack horses she remonstrated in strong terms with our Lord that he should treat his friends so. 'Did you not know that my friends must expect to suffer?' Jesus gently said. According to the legend, St Teresa tartly replied, 'then no wonder you have so few'.

For the woman or man of faith today the pilgrimage of life you make, is more about the hope in you on the journey, than any eagerness to arrive at your destination. It is not about action plans or targets as about living faithfully.

We do seem more concerned to arrive at a place, sometimes it is numbers in church or those baptised, meeting quotas, reaching targets. When you arrive, you set out again; climb the mountain then down the other side. Always travelling, sometimes in circles, sometimes backwards; to be sure, there are glimpses of glory on the way.

It is true you will face many transformations in your life's journey: crossroads, forks in the road, no road at all; transformation is at the heart, the very core of life itself. Evolution, revolution, dust to glory, history, your own experiences let alone your own body, all say there will be conflicting interests and opposing forces. It is a truth, and here, the Christian faith stands supreme, that the most profound transformation has been accompanied by bloodshed, sacrifice made.

Today you use a motorway to travel directly to your destination; in the life of faith that presents difficulties. Despite pressure to say yes or no to the existence of God; despite dogmatic claims sometimes made there is much about faith that hovers uncertainly on the very edge; words are inadequate; that is its nature.

Therefore, why not search for that one equal light? You may find it in the beautiful prayer of John Donne, Dean of St Paul's, when Elizabeth the first was Queen. As the prayer suggests reality dawns only as you open and pass through the gateway of death. Listen...

'Bring us at our last awakening
into the house and gate of heaven,
to enter that gate and dwell in that house,
where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling,
but one equal light;
no noise nor silence,
but one equal music;
no fears nor hopes,
but one equal possession;
no ends nor beginnings,
but one equal eternity,
in the habitations of your glory and dominion.

Thank you for listening