

FAITH

The next seven weeks reflections will focus on faith.

It is not too dramatic to say that we are undergoing a crisis of faith today. The philosopher Louis Dupre has suggested that we need “to decide on a personal attitude toward existence instead of having it conveyed by society or inherited from ancestors”. This “personal attitude” before God and life could very appropriately be the disposition we call faith, an openness or receptivity and readiness for what is waiting to be revealed.

One of the problems of course is that much in our culture is inimical to such a disposition. Living contemplatively, or as Michael Leunig says, “Living slowly, looking softly”, is at odds with our production oriented, success crazed, exploitative society. And it is not helpful that the imagination is too often devalued, impoverishing the language of faith and denying the truth of metaphor and story.

Not more information, but heart is what is needed. Faith needs to be liberated from being too closely allied to religious belief or religious belonging. If we can be less strident and even less certain, yet more aware and in touch with our depths and our hungers, with what it is to be human, we will be open to the possibility of faith. This is what Jesus touched, spoke to and aroused in those he met. The miracle was (and it still happens) that such people’s imaginations were fired and their hope=s awakened so that they could begin to say YES to God’s ever-present invitation into life.

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"the touching of a mystery"

Alexander Schmemmann

Faith is better understood as a verb than a noun, as a process than a possession.

Frederick Beuchner

Catherina de Hueck Doherty talks of the gift we bring when we listen a person's soul into existence". Jesus - in his "openness and availability to others" - aroused in those who met him an attitude or disposition that allowed them to believe in themselves enough to reach out to him. Believing in themselves meant they could begin to take themselves seriously, that in themselves they mattered. Faith is "the awakening of something within, as yet not understood but nevertheless really present". (Karl Rahner)

What or who allows you to think of yourself as mattering? What or who stirs, inspires or moves you to decide for life?

Before formulating into words what you believe, try and get in touch with your pre-conceptual, everyday experience: How do you experience yourself and others? What matters to you? What gets your attention each day? Where do you spend your energy? What energizes you?

Michael Paul Gallagher talks of "human starting points for faith". Get in touch with an experience of friendship, failure, pain or ordinariness. These moments can offer us a different way of living with our ego, a renewed sense of ourselves, an alternative, gentler way of affirming life. Stay with a particular experience - listen to its depth, its invitation. This is the landscape where faith becomes possible, where our "capacity for belief" can germinate.

[Faith] is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbour, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing whatever one sees, and of handling whatever one handles; a capacity to live at more than a mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of a transcendental dimension.

Cantwell Smith

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