

## **LOSING ONE'S FAITH**

Many people have been leaving the Church recently. There are some who give up because they claim to have lost their faith. Of these, some may simply walk away from what they probably have been considering to do for a while. It seems easy for them though I wonder, even for them, if there are not some scars and remaining hurts that have not been mended. One's relation to a transcendent power, no matter how tenuous, hits home to the heart.

But I have also heard from people who admit to have lost their faith but are not happy about it. They may cry, lament, indulge in some guilt, all indications of unfinished business. Faith in God, in the church, in people was part of their growing up and it helped sustain them. Now it seems to be gone. There may be a frantic search to refind that simple, direct and child-like faith that one once enjoyed. One tries to recapture the past. Let me ask you to consider other possible ways to understand one's loss of faith.

Consider this question. Is it really always bad to lose the faith one had? We look back with some enjoyment to remember when we believed in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny or when we thought our parents were God to us. The fact is that we must grow out of these childhood fantasies though they were helpful at the time. The same goes with faith in God. God is not a mama or a papa nor, for that matter, a judge or policeman. All these human images do not suffice as we grow up. There is a grayness to life, many uncertainties, paradoxes and seeming contradictions. We must let go of the old simplicities, not to obtain some new certainty, but to live with a God who is not material, is beyond anything we can imagine. The lives of the Saints portray a journey of coming closer to God whose light blinds, whose darkness baffles us. You may know the story of the saintly Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She was absorbed in her faith and commitment to God as well as her wanting to serve the poorest of the poor (which usually goes with a deeper faith). But she claimed she had no vision of God or certain presence of Jesus for many years of her life. One is getting closer, not farther from God. This God is so far beyond us, is a marvelous abyss of that which is beyond our grasp. It is through silence, through nature, through love above all that we know this God's presence, not by any uncertain understanding of doctrines.

We can stop looking for miracles and certain signs. We can live with doubts. In fact, doubt is not opposed to faith; it rather helps us to grow in faith. What is

## **Monastic Scribe LXXiii: May 17, 2024**

opposed to faith is certainty. When we come to this juncture of our spiritual journey, then we truly can make an act of faith. We know this God is present to us even in the absences. Faith is not a mental thing. It is the whole being that lives with trust in God. Real faith begins when we live with some darkness.

Here is another bone to chew on. What does faith mean to you? Accepting doctrines and proofs of God really comes after we place our faith in God. Merely believing in the existence of God is not what biblical faith is about. That doesn't need faith. If you have been following the reading of the Acts of the Apostles during Eastertime, you may have noticed that people were baptized and committed to Christ not after study and indoctrination but as soon as they truly believed in Jesus Christ. Faith is involving oneself in a personal relationship, in love. In fact, it is love that usually precedes faith. Just look at Mary Magdalen in the gospels! Only afterwards comes the study and understanding of doctrines ("Faith seeking understanding" is how Saint Anselm understood the place of theology.) Though the Catechism in its succinct answers gets it right, teaching Christian doctrine was often presented as the requirement to study orthodox beliefs before baptism, before giving oneself to Christ. And I wonder whether many Christians ever really came to that personal relationship with Jesus.

Saint Jerome, translator of the Bible, said that to be ignorant of the scriptures is to be ignorant of Christ. I think that names a real problem right there. We have been shielded from the scriptures and perhaps shielded from Christ. Of course it is not study of the Bible but a loving relationship with God's Word that opens our heart. Our Catholic Mass is built on hearing this Word and then reenacting the Word in the signs of bread and wine. This is all active engagement of our mind and heart with Jesus Christ.

This is all very exciting to me and I hope I have shared some of this excitement with you. I am offering you a grown-up faith that speaks to our lives. It is shared by [joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org)

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.