

Reflection for Low Sunday Year B

Many of us were probably surprised to see flurries of snow at the start of the week. It is not what we would normally have associated with Easter. Bright evenings with flurries of snow did appear, at best, a bit strange. We would probably find this incompatible with what we would normally hope to see at this time of year. However, as we all discovered over the last year, we have become used to dealing with the unexpected and in some ways, it is almost become par for the course to encounter something different that is unusual at any time of the year. By the end of the week, we were to learn of the passing of the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip at the age of 99. Once again, life and death dominate Easter Week, when we reflect on the Resurrection appearances. Each encounter has a different tone to it, and they all take place in a different setting e.g. the garden, the road to Emmaus, the lakeside and finally the encounter with doubting Thomas. They shape and form a landscape and tapestry of faith that we can find a bit overwhelming. Perhaps we could choose one of the encounters and just place ourselves in that scene and try and imagine what it might have felt like to encounter the Risen Lord when it was totally unexpected. We may just want to soak up the encounter with the Risen Lord without even trying to find the words to express what it might mean. We may find that we are speechless and have simply to gaze in wonder and awe at this new reality. It would only be natural to look at our faith in a new and fresh way so that we might gain something different from this Easter. It is a time for us to be jubilant in our faith. If we cannot celebrate our faith in a renewed way during Easter, then our faith will simply become a void or meaningless. Easter is full of meaning and significance, although there are occasions when we may express our doubt or insecurities about our faith. That, too, is part of the life of faith. The occasional doubt or question can often provide us with an opportunity to move forward in faith and to grow in our understanding of it too. Perhaps these words from Frank Rees, an Australian Baptist theologian might help us overcome our doubts and grow in our faith.

“The idea of God the conversationalist provides a theological basis for understanding the relationship between doubt and faith. Doubt can be seen as a significant element within the divine-human conversation, having potential for enrichment of the conversation as well as for confusion or even abandonment of the relationship. As Walter Brueggemann has found, dialectic tensions within the experience of God are a crucial part of the biblical testimony. God the conversationalist is not limited to a specific context, form, or content of expression. As a consequence, we can see within the biblical texts significant differences in the witness to God’s approach and in the way people respond. In addition to word of promise and texts of hope, there are passages of protest and bitter dispute. Each can represent the word of God; each can express authentic faith.

An important feature of this metaphor of God the conversationalist is that it recognises the place of human beings as genuine participants in the divine conversation. We have a contribution to make in response to God but we are also capable of initiating elements within the conversation. It also follows that no one party knows or can determine in advance how the conversation will proceed. By preserving the genuine freedom of human agents, while maintaining the freedom and creativity of God as well, this theology is both more credible and coherent.

This conception of God attributes positive significance to doubt as an element within the conversation. If we think of faith as participation in the divine conversation, then we can see that doubt – as well as belief and the constructive formulation of our understanding of God and the world – can have a crucial place within the life of faith. Indeed, within the context of divine conversation, we can speak of the activity of God causing us to doubt. The questions God asks can undermine the false certitudes human beings build for themselves, including certitudes about God.”