

## Reflection for Epiphany Year B

A new year has begun, but in many unexpected ways, like one never known or seen before! The customary Hogmanay celebrations were to all intents and purposes non-existent and the traditional first footing just did not happen. We have all become used to using phrases such as strange times or strange days as we try and make sense of the unknown. While vaccines appear to be on the horizon, the process of how and when the vaccine is to be distributed is still to be confirmed. Many people are anxious, insecure and are still frightened. There are a lot of emotions being expressed as we look for a better, brighter and safer future. Covid-19 and Brexit have presented us with new challenges as we look to try find answers to these new questions. This is a new historical moment in which faith tries to find its place in this discussion and to embrace the new cultural exchange that is gripping Europe and the rest of the world. Each week, as we know, brings its own challenges, innovations and restrictions. It is difficult to plan ahead, or to even think what life might be like post Covid-19. For the moment, most of us can only dream of a better and safer place.

At the start of any new year, we might dream of what the new year might bring. This year, we are all struggling to make sense of an empty diary and unsure whether or not we should book a trip abroad. Staycation may become the best option for people to feel safe and healthy. The life of faith continues to feel the impact of the global pandemic as it constantly tries to find a pathway that dares to speak to people even during this Christmas season. The pathway to Bethlehem and to the manger scene is a path of comfort, hope and light. The shepherds found it and the wise men did too. Their pathways different; their gifts symbolic. Both were guided by the angel and the star to bring them to encounter the revealed God. They meet the God of love in the Christ-child event of Bethlehem who meets them where they are. Two radically different pathways are drawn together at the crossroads of faith to encounter the living God in their lives. Even in these unpredictable days, we, too, are invited along a pathway of faith to meet the living God at the crossroads of faith with our own gifts and our own stories. The following words from Richard Leonard, an Australian Jesuit and writer may help us to face the challenges that this year bring for us.

*“It is not childish to call God our friend, or to claim Jesus or the Spirit as our best friend. I think it is a particularly adult idea. Jesus is with us every moment of our life, especially when we wonder where the hell God has gone. Like all our friends who truly love us, God does not inflict pain, set out to punish us, or to set up accidents to teach us lessons or make us grow. Although this unchanging, divine friend may be eternal, self-existent, transcendent, holy and ever-present, God’s loves knows restraint, as the best love always does: a self-imposed restraint on his power and knowledge. Therefore, God does not send natural disasters or famines. God does not kill us off. In fact, the heavenly friend wants nothing to do with death. We know that because of what we see in Jesus. In him there is no darkness, only light, no retribution or revenge, no smiting of the enemy. There is a demand for justice but no reprisals. And Jesus did not enter our world to die but to live, and to be our Way, Truth and Life. Just as Jesus was killed because of the way he loved, so too, God’s last word on Jesus’ death was life, to raise his Son from the grave. As a result, this friend’s will or plan for us is for us to flourish in faith, hope and love as we realise all our gifts and talents.*

*Yet Christ-as-friend does not barge in. He waits patiently for an invitation to enter our lives at whatever level we want. Jesus meets us where we are, embraces us and holds us close when the going gets tough, and helps us find the way forward, even on the last day when we find the way home.”*

Richard Leonard, sj. “What does it all mean? A guide to being more faithful, hopeful and loving,” pages 140/141