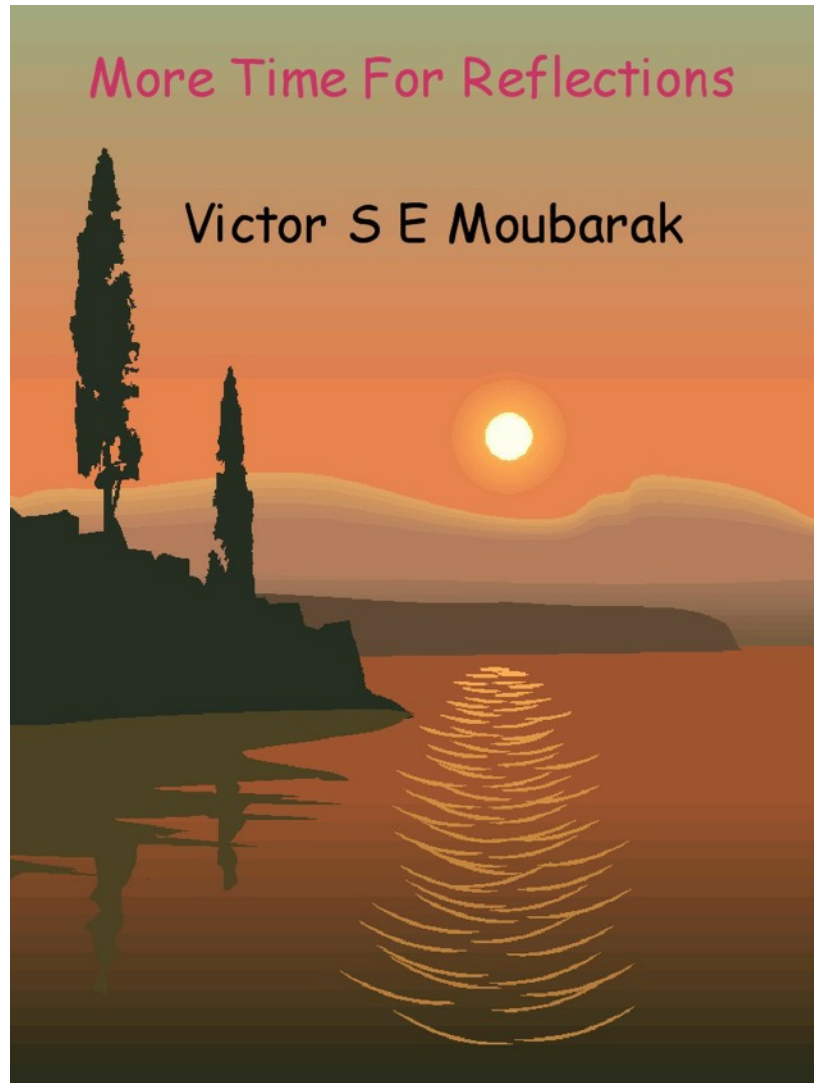


MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS



MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

Also by Victor S E Moubarak



“VISIONS” (ISBN 978 1 60477 032 2).

“VISIONS” is a fictional story of three children who see an apparition of the Lord Jesus on their way to church. They tell their priest, Father Ignatius, about it; and pretty soon news spreads throughout town.

People react to the news in different ways. Some readily believe; others mock and scoff in disbelief, whilst some react violently towards the children and their families.

Parishioners seek guidance from Father Ignatius whereas the Church seeks to hush the whole story in the hope that it goes away; whilst Jesus appears again and again.

“VISIONS” challenges readers to ask what they would do in a similar situation – as Christians, as parents or just as onlookers.

A vibrant tale of supernatural events, with a fast-paced storyline and strong believable characters, “VISIONS” is a challenging must-read Christian book for everyone ready for a reality check on what they actually believe.

“VISIONS” is available from all good bookstores and on the Internet. It is also available in Kindle, Nook and other electronic versions.

I pray that God blesses each one of you dear readers, old and new, and may He be with you and your families always.

Victor S E Moubarak

www.holyvisions.co.uk

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

CREDO

Every large Organisation or institution has a Mission Statement. A statement outlining what the Organisation is set up to do, what are its values, ethics, and purpose.

Many years ago, in the year 325, the first Ecumenical Council of Churches met and wrote a "mission statement" which is better known as the Nicene Creed. The name originates from the city of Nicaea in Turkey, where the Ecumenical Council met.

Also known as the Credo, (I believe), this document or statement has been accepted by most Christian denominations in the world.

It is, in fact, what a Christian truly believes. It is what identifies a Christian from anyone else.

Let's look at it in some detail:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty.

This proclaims at the onset that there is only one God. We are taught to see him and address Him as a Father. A symbol of love, caring, mercy and forgiveness. And that He is almighty; not like any other father here on earth.

Maker of Heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

He is so almighty that He has made everything. Visible and invisible.

This bit is important. It says visible and invisible. Not seen and unseen. If I were to leave one room and enter another I become unseen. But I am not invisible.

The use of the word invisible is to underline the fact that there is an invisible, spiritual, world which we do not see. We are both visible in human form and invisible in our spiritual form - our soul.

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There is also an invisible world of angels and spirits of those departed from this world. As well, of course, as the invisible Holy Spirit.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and born of the Father before all ages. God of God, light of light, true God of true God. Begotten not made, consubstantial to the Father, by whom all things were made.

Note in particular that we say one Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Lord, our Master, and there is no other.

Begotten - born of a Father (God) - not made by God just as He made us, and the planets and everything else.

Before all ages. Jesus has always existed. He did not just begin to exist when He was born on earth. This is when He appeared to us in human form. But before that, He has always existed with God, because He is God.

Consubstantial to the Father. From Latin *consubstantialem*, of one essence or substance. This word was used by the Council of Nicaea (325) to express the Divinity of Christ. The Trinity is not a hierarchy. It isn't God at the top, then Jesus, and then the Holy Spirit. All three are equal and one; and have always been so.

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven. And was incarnate of the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary and was made man;

Another proclamation that Jesus, who always existed, became human form through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.

was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried; and the third day rose again according to the Scriptures.

What is Pilate doing here? Why is he getting a mention in the Creed?

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This is very important and significant. Jesus' life, death and resurrection is not some fairy story we hear and tell our children. "Once upon a time ..."

This is actual fact and it happened at a point in time. When Pilate was ruler. The mention of Pilate is to serve as a beacon in history so that future readers reciting the Creed can identify when these real facts actually happened.

Jesus died and rose again as predicted in the Old Testament by the prophets.

And ascended into Heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father, and shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, of whose Kingdom there shall be no end.

Jesus is indeed King in Heaven with God. We also believe that He is with us here and now in Spiritual form. Always by our side and ready to help us with our needs.

But we also believe that He will return to earth in human form as He did all those years ago.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who together with the Father and the Son is to be adored and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

Another proclamation that the Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit has always existed. Just like God and Jesus.

He inspired the prophets to write what they wrote, and to predict the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The prophets did not make it all up as a fairy story. They were told by the Holy Spirit what to write.

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And the holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

The word holy does not refer to us. There are plenty of so-called Christians who are far from holy! This refers to the Church. It was created by Jesus through Peter and it is holy because of this.

Catholic means throughout the world, universal. (*Katholikos* from *katholou*).

Apostolic means belonging and starting from the Apostles as chosen by Christ.

I confess one baptism for the remission of sins.

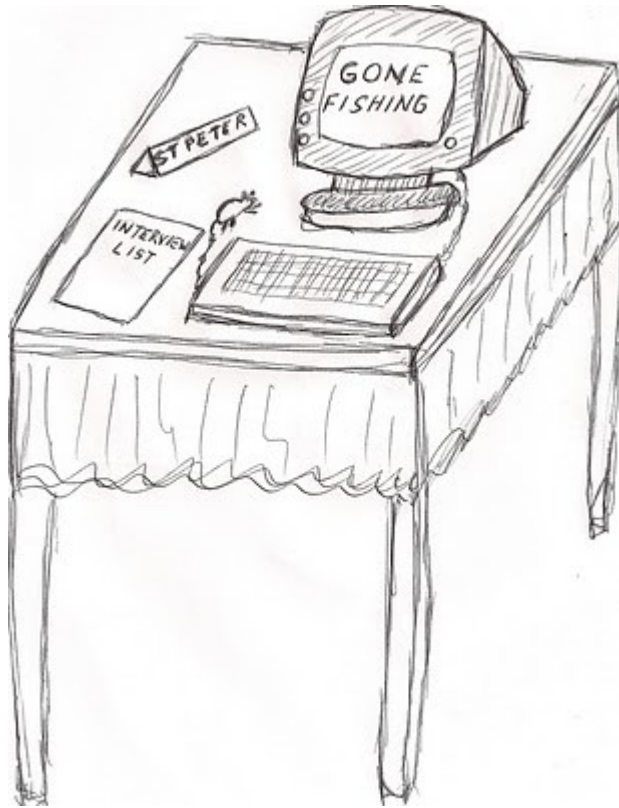
If we are to be put right with God we just have to accept Him through baptism and to confess and be sorry for our sins.

And I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

This is yet again very significant. Here we proclaim that this life, in this world, is only a passing phase. When we die there will be a resurrection and a new spiritual life in a spiritual world.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

THREE WISHES



There I was face to face with St Peter. He looked at his computer monitor and said. "Yep ... your credentials are OK. You've made it. Welcome to Heaven!"

I smiled silently.

"We like our guests to be very comfortable here" continued the Saint, "and not feel too disoriented from where they come from. So you're allowed to go back to earth for a short period and bring with you three items from down there which will help make you more comfortable up here.

"I have to enter them on the computer ... so, what will they be?"

I stopped and thought for a few moments. Three items ... what could I bring from earth which will make my eternity here more pleasant ... as if that were possible.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

I saw him smile at that last thought.

Perhaps I could bring my MP3 player with all my music collection ... that would be nice.

He frowned a little and was about to type when I added ... "Oh ... it's got Latin hymns on it too ..." He said nothing and I saw him type 3PM in the reflection of his spectacles.

Perhaps I could also bring my DVD collection of all those movies I never had time to see ...

He interrupted my thoughts by saying, "Whilst you're thinking about this can I also tell you that you can bring three people from down there to share Heaven with you. Who will they be?"

"Three people?" I thought, "but I know more than three people whom I'd love to see in Heaven for eternity.

"My wife ... my children, my extended family, my friends, and all my Blogging friends whom I've 'met' through the Internet. There's many more than just three people I'd like here with me.

"But ... but ... their lives are so inter-dependent. If I bring my wife here, who will look after the children left behind? And is it right and fair to bring young children here before they've had a chance to live life? How about my extended family ... I can't bring one and leave the others behind? This is so unfair!"

"Sit down," said the Saint sternly, "you think it is unfair because you see things through human perspective. You analyze and measure things your way; often in a possessive manner.

"You say things like my wife, my children, my parents and my friends ... as if these people belong to you.

"No one and nothing belongs to anybody and everything belongs to God.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

"God gave life and only He decides when it ends and whether people come here or ... the other place.

"You humans often complain when a young life is taken or when someone leaves dependents behind with seemingly no one to care for them.

"You forget that God is there to care for them, and He leaves plenty of opportunities for those people left behind to take on the task He has set them.

"Everyone has his allotted time on earth, and whilst there, their main job is to do God's will so that when their turn comes to leave earth they end up here! You understand?"

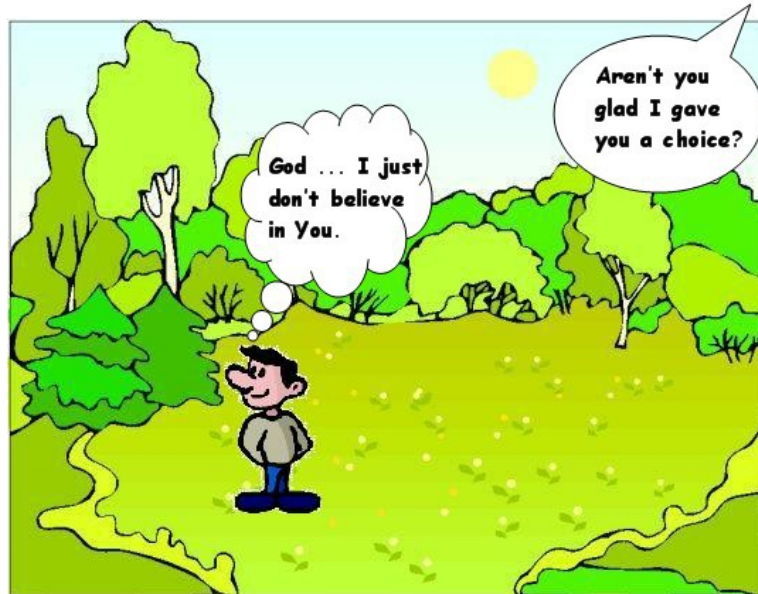
I nodded meekly.

"Now tell me," he continued with a smile, "which Latin hymns do you have in your collection?"

"Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do what my Father in Heaven wants them to do." Matthew 7:21.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

ANGRY VENGEFUL GOD?



Imagine you've died and gone to Heaven.

Joy of joys !!! At last, you've made it. God has seen it fit for you to deserve Heaven. An eternity with Him. You are so glad, more than you've ever been your entire life.

You look around and meet old friends and relatives who have made it here too. You greet them with a tear in your eye - a tear of joy as well as a little sadness when you remember how you missed them and cried when they were gone!

You renew old acquaintances as well as make new ones as you meet the Saints you've read so much about but had never met.

Then you realise someone is missing.

A relative, or friend, whom you'd expected to see here is missing. You ask St Peter and he confirms your suspicion. That person is not here.

Is he in transit? In the Purification Center we call Purgatory, perhaps?

No ... he is ... in the other place.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

Your joy turns to sadness, confusion, despair even. How can it be? You so expected to be with that person in Heaven for eternity.

What do you do?

Seek an explanation from God? Perhaps there's been a mistake! Ask Him to re-consider. Plead with Him even? Beg that this person is brought up to Heaven?

Has that person's absence tarnished your joy of being in Heaven?
Changed your view of God's justice and mercy?

How can you possibly be here in Heaven for ever, knowing full well that a dear loved one is in the other place and will never join you?

On the Cross Jesus forgave those who dared to inflict so much suffering and death to the Son of God. What more heinous sin could your relative or friend have committed to deserve an eternity in hell?

Your human sense of justice; and your understanding and perspective of forgiveness and mercy would like things to be different and, no matter what that person has done in life, you wish him here with you in Heaven.

But God does not work like that. His perspective is not a human perspective. He decided otherwise.

In Luke 16:19-31 we read that the rich man in "the other place" pleaded that his brothers may not join him there. But his pleadings were met with the response that each person makes his or her own decisions in life, and by their actions they choose whether to go to Heaven or not.

No one goes to hell by mistake. We choose to go there. And many, by their actions, are sleep-walking their way to hell.

The time for action and prayers is now. And yet ... what if we're one day in Heaven and our loved one is not there? What then?

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

OUR FATHER

"Our Father who art in heaven....."

"Yes. How can I help you?"

"Hein? Who's that?"

"You called me. I'm listening ..."

"I didn't call anybody ... I was just praying ... The Lord's Prayer! Our Father who art in Heaven ..."

"That's me ... Your Father in Heaven ... now carry on praying ..."

"Eh ... Hallowed be Thy name ..."

"Ha ... Do you remember when you were very young you used to say 'Harold be Thy name'? For a long time you were convinced my name is Harold; until someone put you right. What does it mean anyway ... Hallowed be Thy name?"

"Eh ... hmmm ... does it mean you are Holy?"

"That's right ... carry on ..."

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven."

"Hold it just there ... Do you really mean what you just said?"

"Sure, of course I do ..."

"Or do you mean 'Thy will be done' as long as it is what you want? Do you really accept my will all the time? Even when it's not convenient for you, or when life gets a little difficult?"

"Well ... sometimes when things get really bad I get very worried ..."

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"At least you're honest. Remember this always; when things are really bad for you it is still my will. I allow it to happen but I never abandon you. I'm always close to you ... all you have to do is trust me."

"Gee ... thanks."

"Carry on ..."

"Give us this day our daily bread ..."

"Let's stop again ... This means that I will provide for all your needs. It's good of you to ask; but rest assured that I will always provide you with what you need. Go on with your prayer ..."

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us ..."

"Even your neighbour?"

"What?"

"You never forgave your neighbour after that argument you had a few days ago ... In fact you still hope that you'll get even some day ..."

"But ... but ... You know it was his fault!"

"Of course it was ... and he did apologise. But unless you truly forgive him, you truly no longer hold a grudge and have no ill-will or ill-feelings towards him; it doesn't count does it?"

"That's not always easy ..."

"I agree ... But true forgiveness means that you no longer wish any retribution or revenge against those who have hurt you. Sure ... you'll always remember the wrong done to you, but let that be a reminder to forgive them once again and to pray for them."

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

"Can I go on now?"

"Yes ..."

"And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil."

"This bit is a reminder that Satan is always there trying to take you away from me. He tried to tempt my only Son Jesus, so you're not going to be much of a challenge to him. Whenever he tries to lead you astray repeat those words over and over again and I will come to your help."

"Thank you ..."

"It's getting late ... go to sleep now!"

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

KYRIE ELEISON

Originally, the Mass in Eastern Europe, where it started, was celebrated in Greek.

With time, as Christianity spread further West into Europe it was celebrated in Latin.

And as time moved on, it is now celebrated in English, or whichever language is spoken in the Country where Mass is celebrated.

Except for three words which have survived time and are still from the original Greek Mass.

Kyrie Eleison
Christe Eleison

Meaning "Lord have mercy" and "Christ have mercy".

It is important to remember that by "Lord", or "Sir" we do not mean that we look up to Our Lord as some Master or Ruler. In this context, the word "Kyrie" means "Lord" in the sense of a child looking up to one's loving parent and asking for help, love, guidance and protection.

So when we sing at Mass "Kyrie Eleison" we look up to God our loving Father and ask Him to be always by our side and have mercy on us. And we call upon Christ His Son, in the same prayer.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

ALLELUIA

When celebrating a Catholic Mass, just before the reading of the Gospel, the congregation and choir sing "Alleluia".

It's an old English word, derived from Latin, and originally from the Hebrew word Halleluyah meaning "Praise the Lord!"

Now ... if we look carefully in our Missal, it says "May be omitted if not sung".

Have you ever wondered why it says so?

Well ... let's imagine you are at a Birthday Party and in a straight face you recite calmly:

**Happy Birthday to you
Happy Birthday to you
Happy Birthday dear friend
Happy Birthday to you**

It doesn't quite have the same effect does it? It just has to be sung.

Some songs have to be sung. They cannot be recited, however well we might try.

And it's the same with the "Alleluia. It is an ancient song of praise to Our Lord giving us all an opportunity, however bad we may think our voices are, to praise Our Lord in song for all He has done for us.

So let us raise our voices in joy and Praise Him now and when we next attend Mass.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

THE GOOD SAMARITAN - MODERN VERSION

Once upon a time an elderly man was making his way home through the park after a long day at work. Some youths set upon him. They were carrying knives. They mugged him, injured him badly and left him lying in a pool of blood.

A while later a city gent happened to pass by. He looked at the bleeding man on the ground and thought: This may be a trap. If I stop to help him someone might come out from the bushes and attack me. I'd better hurry home.

And so he did.

A few moments later another man happened to come along. He saw the elderly man on the ground and thought: I'd better pretend not to have seen him. If I stop and call the police and ambulance they will ask me a lot of questions. They will want a lot of information. I'll be a witness and I'll probably have to go to Court eventually to say what I saw. I really can't be bothered with all this. I'd better rush home.

And so he did.

A few minutes later a learned man came by. He had studied sociology, philosophy, and many other important subjects and he was now a famous professor at the local University whose opinion and views were often sought on matters of importance. He looked at the injured man on the ground and thought: Whoever did this needs help. They must be from an under-privileged background and up-bringing. Poor souls!

And he hurried home thinking about modern society and decided to write a paper on crime and poverty.

Moral of the story: Two thousand years after Jesus told a similar story, (Luke 10:25), life hasn't changed so much in this world.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

There are times in life when you know what you want to say. You're sure of your facts and you just have to state your opinion and leave it at that. Whether people accept it or not! This is your point of view. Well thought out and considered.

Jesus came to that point many years ago. He was with His disciples and followers and in conversation He said "I am the bread of life ... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them." (John 6: 25 onwards).

Very confusing words indeed. If I were there at the time I would have said "Hein? What are you talking about?"

Actually, this is what some of Christ's followers said. They asked "What does He mean? Eat His flesh and drink His blood?"

They thought that this time He had gone too far. Of course, He often spoke in parables and it was left to them to interpret what He was saying ... but this time it was clear. He said, more than once, that we should eat His flesh and drink His blood.

Not surprisingly, quite a few felt that this was too much. Better to distance themselves from this Man who is talking way beyond any sensible person can take. They decided to leave Him and stop being associated with Jesus.

So what did Jesus do?

Did He call them back and say "Wait a minute ... let me explain what I meant. It was only a figure of speech. Don't take it too literally ..."

No. He just let them leave.

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He knew what He was saying. He was sure of His facts. He said them clearly and left it at that. Take it or leave it. The choice is yours.

In fact, He gave His twelve disciples the choice to leave too if they felt this was too much for them.

Peter replied for them all when he said "To whom shall we go. We believe in You".

Today, years later, nothing has really changed. We have His words. And we have a simple choice.

To believe (without questions and without trying to understand) ... or not.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

I AM THE GATE

In the Gospel of John Chapter 10 Jesus says several times "I am the gate".

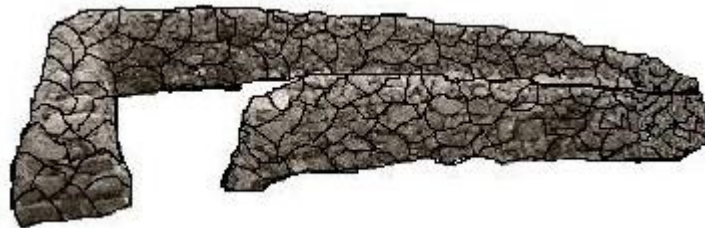
In Chapter 10 - 9 He says "I am the gate. Those who come in by me will be saved; they will come in and go out and find pasture."

This seems strange at first. We can understand when Jesus says "I am the Way" or "I am the Good Shepherd"; but gate? What does all that mean?

To understand this we need to visualise how a sheep pen at the times of Christ looked like. It was a circular or square enclosure built out of stone, wooden fencing or just hedges. And it had an opening through which sheep got in and out.

But shepherds in those days were poor people. They certainly would not have the money to build gates at the opening of the pen. They stayed "watching their flocks by night" with their sheep.

The pen looked something like this:



And the shepherd would lie across the opening, sleeping with his sheep, and making sure that none would get out during the night. Also protecting them from wolves or other predators.

So, the shepherd was in fact the gate.

That's what Jesus meant when He said He is the gate.

He protects us from evil and stops us from going astray.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

RESURRECTION FACTS

As we celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord let us remember that this particular event gave rise to many speculations and rumours all those years ago, and indeed over the years since then.

Let's consider the facts as we know them.

A man claiming to be the Son of God was crucified and died a most horrible death.

After His death, His followers claimed that He rose from the dead as He had said He would.

Now let's look at the rumours and the conspiracy theories.

It is possible that Christ's disciples and followers stole and hid the body of Jesus to perpetuate the story that He is the Son of God and that His Father raised Him from the dead.

But if that were the case; what benefit is there to them to disseminate this story knowing full well that it is a lie? Why suffer persecution, imprisonment, torture and death for something you know to be false? Would you do that?

The other theory is that the Jews, the Sadducees or Pharisees, removed the body in order to stop any beliefs that Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God.

But if that were the case; then why not produce the body once the disciples said that Jesus rose from the dead and invalidate the story of the Resurrection right from the start? Isn't that what one would expect in such circumstances?

Another hypothesis is that Christ never died at all. He just lost consciousness or was in a coma, and He woke up once again and walked out of the tomb.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

But the Romans were very thorough people. They made sure that those crucified were indeed dead by breaking their legs whilst hanging there. They did not do so to Jesus because when they checked He was already dead. Even so, they did pierce His side with a spear just to make sure.

And then; there is of course the fact:

Christ died on the Cross and rose from the dead.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

FATHER IGNATIUS MAKES A DISCOVERY

There are times when a light turns on in your head and you see something clearly for the first time and understand something new you'd never realized before.

Father Ignatius was a studious type of person spending many hours reading the Bible as well as many books on theology, ancient history and similar subjects which would soon send any lesser head spinning widely.

One evening he retired to the room he called "my meditation corner" and after reciting the Rosary he started reading the Bible and cross-referencing certain passages with other books to better understand what God is teaching through His Word.

One passage in particular caught his interest. After Christ's death and burial, we are told that Mary Magdalene visited the tomb and found the stone rolled away from the entrance. She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple and told them what she had seen. Peter and the other disciple ran to the tomb. When Simon Peter got in and went inside he noticed the linen wrappings lying there, but the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded and lying to the side.

There it was, in the Gospel of John Chapter 20 Verse 7.

Father Ignatius puzzled about this for a moment or two. He'd read that chapter many times and nothing specific occurred to him. But this time, as if a small voice buzzing in his head, he kept wondering the significance of what he had read.

"Why are we told that the cloth which covered Jesus' head was folded and lying to the side? What's so important about that?" Father Ignatius asked himself.

Yet somehow, John thought it important enough to mention it. Why?

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

Father Ignatius checked the other three Gospels but they did not mention this fact. "But why did John consider it so significant to point it out" he wondered silently.

After hours of searching other books and checking on ancient traditions he came upon something he'd never known before.

In ancient Hebrew tradition the folded napkin was symbolic between the master of the house and his servant.

When the servant set the dinner table he made sure that everything was perfectly set out as the master wished and then he would wait out of sight until the master finished eating.

The servant would not clear the table until the master had finished.

When the master finished his meal he would wipe his fingers and mouth with the napkin and then toss the napkin on the table.

The servant would then clear the table, because in those days a tossed napkin meant "I've finished."

However ... and this is the significant bit which Father Ignatius discovered for himself, if the master left the table but neatly folded the napkin and laid it beside his plate, the servant would not touch the table.

Because the folded napkin meant "I'm coming back!"

"He's coming back ..." mumbled Father Ignatius in wonderment.

That's what John was trying to tell us in his Gospel.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

WHY DID NO ONE ASK HIM?

Father Ignatius tried something new with his congregation. He suggested they held an "Any Questions" meeting whereby members of the audience would ask him and Father Donald any question, totally unprepared and unscripted, and they would try to answer it.

It was the first such event held at the church center and that evening in question was well attended. About fifty people turned up, which by all standards was a good attendance on a cold winter evening. Some volunteers had prepared hot chocolate and tea and plenty of cakes had been brought in and enjoyed before the meeting started.

At first the questions were somewhat tentative and easily dealt with by either priest, mainly relating to the running of the church, Mass times in winter, and the diminishing amount received in Sunday collections.

But then a young lady stood up and asked the top table: "May I read something before I ask my question?"

"While Jesus was eating, a woman came in with an alabaster jar full of very expensive perfume made from pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on Jesus' head. Some of the people there became angry and said to one another, 'What was the use of wasting the perfume? It could have been sold for more than three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor!' And they criticized her harshly.

But Jesus said, 'Leave her alone! Why are you bothering her? She has done a fine and beautiful thing for me. You will always have poor people with you, and any time you want to, you can help them. But you will not always have me.'

"This is from Mark 14 3-7," she concluded.

"My question to you Fathers is 'Why?'" she then asked hesitantly.

"Why what?" asked Father Donald in his broad Glaswegian accent.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

"Why did Jesus say 'You will always have poor people with you?'"

Before either priest could answer a man at the front said; "Good point ... Is Jesus saying poverty will be with us always? Is He saying that all our efforts to help the poor are in vain?"

"Might as well not bother," mumbled another man sitting beside him.

The two priests looked at each other. Father Ignatius cleaned his glasses slowly and said nothing at first.

"Of course we should bother ..." declared Father Donald, "it is our duty to help the poor. Jesus was making the point that He would soon be Crucified and gone from the people, whereas the poor will always be with us. Don't you agree Ignatius?"

"Well ..." replied Father Ignatius slowly, "two thousand years later and we still have poverty in this world. So Christ was not far wrong with what He said.

"But let us look at what Jesus said in a wider context.

"Could He perhaps be talking about something more than just material poverty?"

"Is He maybe reminding us that there will always be someone worse off than us? Someone who is poor in material things, someone poor in spirit, poor in health, poor in education or even poor in Faith. This may be misinterpreting Him perhaps but still worth considering.

"We all have a responsibility towards those in poverty in one way or another. No matter how their poverty manifests itself.

"We should always readily recognize our blessings and share them with those less well off than us.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

"If we are fortunate to be financially rich, we should give to those who have not.

"If we are in good health, we should help those who are sick. Visit them at home or in hospital, and give a hand when needed.

"If we are clever or intelligent we should be more tolerant towards those not as bright as us and help educate them where we can.

"And if our Faith is strong, we should help and pray for those who falter and fail in their walk with the Lord."

"Wow ... I never saw it this way ..." commented the original questioner.

"We've all been given some talent or other" added Father Donald, "and we should use them for the benefit of others."

"So I suppose Jesus could be referring to poverty in the wider sense, as well as physical poverty of course," continued Father Ignatius, "and such poverty, whatever it may be, will continue with us as a permanent reminder of our responsibilities towards others as well as towards God Himself.

"Our talents are to be used for His glory to help others"

"Talking of talents," interjected Father Donald, "may I remind you that if any of you has a talent for singing do not confine it to singing in the bath. The choir is always looking for new singers so come along to rehearsals."

"As long as you don't bring your bath with you," chuckled Father Ignatius.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

THE DEVIL IN DISGUISE

Imagine if the devil suddenly appeared to you in all his horrendous horrible evilness? You'd probably be so frightened that he'd scare the socks off you. I know I'd probably fall off my chair if I saw him.

In fact, if he appeared like as I describe, the chances are that he'd immediately convert people to Christianity through total fear of him. Which would be counter-productive from his perspective.

So instead, he appears in disguise as nice, cuddly, harmless, no sin implied temptations. And slowly, surely, many are attracted to him and hand in hand walk with him almost somnambulistically into hell.

Perhaps we should give the devil our 100% attention and ensure he has Zero% influence on our lives.

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MATERIALISTIC CHRISTMAS

They say that Christmas has become materialistic. And how true this is.

But surely it is right that Christmas is materialistic - in the proper sense of the word!

Let's consider this: God - A spirit somewhere out there in the universe He created, decided to materialise and come down to earth.

He materialised, assumed a physical form, as the human Jesus, born by the Blessed Virgin Mary.

God materialised to be amongst us, so that we may see Him, speak to Him, listen to Him and hopefully learn from Him.

And most important of all, to be saved by Him. God - Jesus. The Spirit materialising for us.

Now how wonderful is that?

Do we ever stop and wonder about the real miracle of Christmas and the true meaning of materialism?

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ANGELS LOOKING DOWN

One day Jesus was walking around Heaven and He noticed a few Angels looking down to earth and saying: "Two minutes ... four minutes ... one minute ... six minutes ..."

"What are you doing?" He asked.

"We're checking how long it will take these people to thank God after they wake up from a night's sleep!"

WHAT CHANCES?

What's the point of giving someone a second chance when you could quite easily give him a third, fourth, fifth and more?

Can you imagine what it would be like if God only gave us a second chance?

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WELCOME TO HELL

Well, I hope the title of this article has captured your attention for the next minute or so.

Whatever you conceive it to be, hell does exist all right! It may be an ever-burning everlasting fire mixed with the acrid smell of burning flesh and sulphur. Or it may be just a state of consciousness in the total absence of God's presence and love.

When I was at school, many moons ago, a schoolboy described hell as being upside-down for eternity in a pile of manure. Now, there's an image you'd probably never thought of.

And as sure as hell exists we can be certain that the devil exists too.

He is not just a euphemism for evil, wickedness and wrong-doings. He is a living being, with us here and now, every day, and intent on the destructions of souls.

As Christians we cannot possibly believe in God and not believe in the devil. Yet, sadly for us, and fortunately for him, he has been cleverly air-brushed away from our sermons and our churches and our lives.

When is the last time you heard a sermon on Sunday about the dangers of the devil? I haven't for at least a lifetime!

Yet, the devil belongs to the priest's sermon as surely as God does.

You wouldn't expect to drive on a perilous road without any warning signs of sharp bends, steep hills, and blind corners, would you? Yet we seem happy to live our lives oblivious of the very existence of a cunning and dangerous enemy ever eager to lead us to damnation when we least expect it.

There are indeed people who believe in the devil to the point of worshiping him. Whilst I cannot understand why anyone should wish to do

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so, at least I acknowledge their honesty in so doing; which is more honest than the millions of so-called Christians who attend church every Sunday yet don't know exactly what to believe.

In December 2007, I understand, the Pope issued a directive to the Church to train and appoint priest exorcists in every Diocese to combat the spread of Satanism.

Well, at least he believes in the devil and is prepared to do something about it.

Has this message reached all priests I wonder? And if it hasn't, then surely it is evidence of the success of the devil himself.

Has the Church globally heeded the Pope's warning and taken any action?

More pertinent point, do our priests everywhere, regardless of denomination, actually believe in the existence of the devil as a living being; or do they espouse the milder euphemism of what he represents?

Do you?

Or are there millions of Christians everywhere sleep-walking their way into hell?

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TRUST ME, I'M A DOCTOR

When you visit your doctor you expect him to make you well and to ease your aches and pains.

But what does the doctor expect of you?

He expects you to trust him, and to believe he has your best interests at heart.

Your relationship would not be the same if you thought your doctor was inexperienced or incompetent in any way.

And when you seek advice from your lawyer, he expects you to trust him and to act on his counsel.

And when you turn to God with all your woes and worries, He too expects you to trust Him and to know what He is doing.

He does not expect you to tell Him in every detail how He should solve your problems.

"Thy will be done."

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GOD'S PIZZA

I rang the local supermarket manager today and I complained about a frozen pizza I'd just bought.

I really looked forwards to enjoying that pizza. I started the oven to get it to warm up to the required temperature as it said on the pizza packet; and then when this was achieved, I pulled out the pizza out of the packet. It was wrapped in that transparent cellophane stuff as usual ... and that's when I discovered that the pizza had no toppings!

Yes ... the pizza had no toppings at all. No tomato sauce, no cheese, no lovely pepperoni sausage slices covered with herbs and all the other beautiful ingredients that I can clearly see in the picture on the cardboard box. The pizza in my hand was completely devoid of any toppings whatsoever and bore no resemblance to the pizza depicted on the cardboard box. I was getting hotter than the oven with anger.

I told the supermarket manager that I was really upset about this. I'd come home expecting a great Italian meal, I'd set the table with my best cutlery and a good bottle of Italian wine, got the oven ready and hot ... only to be disappointed with a pizza with no topping.

The manager apologized profusely on behalf of his Company and asked me to return the offending pizza to him in person and he'll compensate me with a new pizza and a very generous voucher to be exchanged for anything from his shop.

Our telephone conversation lasted about five minutes or so, and it was only when I finished speaking to the manager and I put the phone down that I realized I was holding the pizza in my hand upside down!

How often do we complain to God when things go wrong in our lives when all along it was our doing which caused the problem in the first place?

Have you reason to complain about God's pizza right now? Check first that you are not in the wrong and ask His forgiveness instead.

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NOT IN HEAVEN SURELY!!!

A few friends were discussing religion and the conversation turned to whether animals go to Heaven.

Some thought this unlikely since animals have no souls; others believed they'll meet their pets in Heaven.

This set me thinking.

Which animals in particular would go to Heaven? The good ones? Whilst the bad ones are destined for hell.

Are there bad animals? Do they think, plot and plan like humans, or are they slaves to their own instincts? Can they possibly sin?

Would all animals go to Heaven? Including the cows, pigs, sheep and chickens we kill to eat?

I would hate to come face to face with my Sunday roast admonishing me for what I have done.

What about the mosquito I killed in the garden this morning? Will it haunt me for eternity?

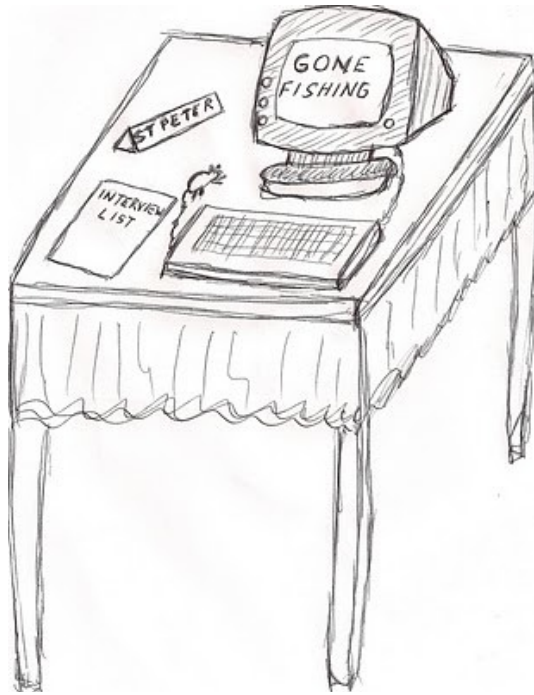
And all those fishes caught by Peter and the disciples when asked to cast their nets in the lake by Jesus. Will they be there too?

The point I'm trying to make here is that religion relies on Faith. When Christians engage in debate such as this not only do they risk confusing themselves, but they also risk confusing those who are new in their walk with the Lord.

I really don't know whether my beloved Max will greet me in Heaven wagging his tail. In the meantime, I try to steer clear from such hypothetical discussions.

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HEAVENLY VERDICT



A man dies and goes to Heaven.

He is surprised to be led into a well-furnished room where St Peter is sitting at a large desk in front of a computer.

St Peter invites him to sit down and taps his details into the computer.

"I'm surprised to see a computer here," says the man hesitantly, trying to make polite conversation, "I thought you'd have a big book with parchment paper and all our names written there ..."

"Oh ... that's a common misconception," replies St Peter, "we replaced the big books years ago ... they were a bit unwieldy and heavy ... and they were a bit slow to use ... you know what it's like ... searching pages after pages for someone's name ..."

"Yes ..." says the man nervously, "computers are much faster ..."

"They sure are ..." smiles St Peter clicking away on the keyboard, "a few key strokes here and there and we have all the information we need on

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view ... the whole of one's life is here for me to read ..."

"Does the computer ever go wrong?" asks the man, sweating a little with concern about his prospects of entry, "I know they often went wrong on earth ..."

"Oh yes ..." replies the Saint chuckling quietly, "computers are computers whether on earth or here in Heaven ... it's just a machine ... and all machines go wrong now and then ... not like a book ... what is written there remains there ... unless it is altered or the page is torn away ... which is obvious to the eye ... you can easily see an alteration in a book ..."

"But computers sometimes freeze up ... or play up every now and then and you can't move forward to the next screen ..."

"Thumping the computer on the side doesn't always work ... I find that Control Alt and Delete does the trick. Either that, or I just switch it off and on again ... ha ha ha ... that sorts it all right!"

St Peter stops for a while chuckling to himself and scratching his long white beard before deciding what to input next on his computer.

"But ... but ... what if the database is wrong ... an input error somewhere in the system ..." splutters the man in a panic, "you could send a poor soul in the wrong place by mistake ..."

"No one goes to hell by mistake ... that never happens," said the Saint confidently, "we have a fail safe system for that ..."

"God is supervising every transaction in another room. He has a monitor on His desk and He automatically checks every decision I make here on my computer. He is good that way ... and he NEVER makes mistakes ..."

"The other day I had a guy here who had been a good man all his life. Never broke the law, was faithful to his wife, loved his children, worked hard ... that sort of thing ... he even went to church now and then."

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"But he'd only done one good thing in his entire life ... he once gave ten cents to a beggar in the street.

"I didn't know what to decide ... so I e-mailed God. A few seconds later He replied:

" 'Give him his ten cents back and tell him to go to hell!' "

Moral of the story:

"Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do what my Father in Heaven wants them to do." Matthew 7:21

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GOD'S ROBOTS?

A discussion the other day: What if you could eliminate one characteristic out of human nature, which one would it be?

Someone suggested anger. Someone else said envy ... jealousy, hatred, prejudice, fear ... and so on.

What if this were possible; what would you get as a result?

A robot. Someone pre-programmed by you with whatever emotions you feel should stay in and which ones taken out.

But God decided differently.

He gave us all these emotions, both positive and negative ones, and with them He gave us a responsibility.

The responsibility to keep them under control and to use them properly.

Even some negative emotions have a purpose if controlled properly and used in the right circumstances. If we didn't have anger we would not be so disposed to stand up against evil. Fear keeps us from being foolhardy and reckless at times.

So there you have it: negative and positive emotions and a responsibility to control them.

Phew ... I'm suddenly tired with all these responsibilities!

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HEAVEN

Although Heaven is mentioned often in the Bible there's only one instance where we have a glimpse of a description. In John 14:2 Jesus says: In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

I suppose Jesus used this description because He wanted an example that His listeners could relate to. They were used to seeing palaces and mansions so He described Heaven as a building.

Some time ago, I came across another description of Heaven. This priest said in a sermon that when we die and meet God, He will sit us on His lap like a little child and He will show us our life all over again. Just like a movie. There, we will see all the good and the bad we have done. All the opportunities we missed when we could have helped others less fortunate than ourselves, all the hurt we have caused by what we have done or said, whether intentionally or not. And there, on His lap, will be our own Heaven or hell.

Now imagine it is really so ... Imagine seeing your whole life as a movie ...

Imagine you are now a Film Director ... what an opportunity you have to make sure your movie will have a happy ending !!!

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THIS MAN

Imagine you're a person of authority in a Court of Law.

The judge, the final arbiter, whatever you say happens.

And they bring to you a man. He is fairly ordinary looking and they accuse Him of saying He is the Son of God. And this is blasphemy according to the Law and He should be put to death.

Before you make such a momentous decision on the man's life, you decide to do some investigations.

You check and you find that this man has been around for about three years or so. He has been travelling up and down the land, and He has indeed said several times that He is the Son of God. He preaches to people and He tells them to repent from their sins and to follow the Way of the Lord.

So you wonder about this and you think "Well, maybe if I can prove that this man is mad, I could let Him off. I could tell the people that He is insane, and they should let Him go, and I could warn Him not to repeat what He says because it would get Him into deep trouble".

So you check on the man's sanity and you find that indeed He is not mad at all. Many people can testify to the fact that he has preached in the temples, and He has debated with religious elders, and shows no sign of being mentally insane whatsoever. Indeed, He is very wise.

And you also find that this man seems to have some supernatural powers because He has healed many people up and down the country. The blind can see, the deaf can hear, the dumb can talk and the lame can walk. And there's plenty of evidence for what He has done. There's even a Roman Officer who can testify that He has healed. What better evidence do you want?

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And also, you understand, that apparently He has raised people from the dead. Now that's very strange. No one has ever done that before. But again there's plenty of evidence of that. There's the family of a man called Lazarus who apparently had died and had been entombed for a few days yet Jesus raised him from the dead and raised other people from the dead.

And when He preaches He says to people "Your Faith has saved you" whatever that means. And He heals them.

He doesn't charge at all for what He is doing. He just wants people to repent and follow the Lord.

So you wonder whether He's some sort of trickster, some sort of charlatan. So you order your soldiers to beat Him up and to rough Him a bit to see whether He admits to being a liar, a cheat.

Your soldiers torture Him, beat Him up, they put a crown of thorns on His head because He claims to being a King of some sort. But after all that the man still does not say anything in His defence.

So you give up. You think, "Well, He is one of their people. He is not one of us. So what's it to do with me if they want to kill Him."

So you give orders for Him to be put to death.

Your soldiers put a Cross on His back and ask Him to carry it all the way to the place where He is nailed to that Cross and left there to die.

And just before He dies He asks God in Heaven, to forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing.

What's more strange is that three days later this very man is Himself raised from the dead. And a lot of people see Him and can testify to his Resurrection.

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Now I wonder. Is this enough evidence that this man is really the Son of God?

Because it is for me.

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EMMAUS

Just after Christ's Resurrection, two of His followers were going to Emmaus. (Luke 24: 13-35).

They were totally distraught about Jesus' death, and even though there was now news that His tomb is empty and that Christ is alive, they were still down-hearted and confused.

Jesus appeared to them on the way. They did not recognize Him. They spoke with Him and told Him their news. They said that their Lord and leader had been crucified, and there were rumours going around that He was alive again.

Jesus did not tell them who He was but explained to them the prophets' predictions about Him. He walked with them all the way to Emmaus, but still they did not recognize Him. It wasn't until He broke and blessed the bread that they recognized Him.

Why? I ask myself.

Why did they not recognize Him when they first saw Him, or when He took the time to explain to them the writings of the prophets?

Could it be that their minds were more pre-occupied with their problems and their dilemma rather than listening to Him?

You can just imagine how their mind worked and how concerned they were about their predicament.

Their leader is dead. What are they to do now? Is it all over? Every thing He said and taught comes to nothing? And what of the future? What are His followers to do now?

But aren't we just the same.

How often do events touch our lives and turn it upside down. Events

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perhaps of our making, or events that we did not contribute to but they affect us all the same.

And we panic. What are we to do now? What will happen next?

We fear the future, we fear matters getting out of our control and we turn our attention to our problems and our dilemma. Just like those two on the way to Emmaus.

Yet, all the time we are panicking Jesus is there. Walking beside us. Quite literally. Waiting for us to recognize Him, hold His hand in the full knowledge and trust that He will see us through our darkest hour.

It is our doubts, our fears and our worries which prevent us from seeing Him.

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PETER, THOMAS AND PAUL - THE CONNECTION

Sometimes, God allows some bad things to happen. At the time we don't understand why; but sometimes, in time, God allows us to see the reason behind His will.

Peter knew Jesus for about three years. He had heard Him teach and preach and had witnessed many of His miracles. Yet, at the most important time, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times.

How bad is that? Terrible you might say. God allowed it to happen.

But let us consider the alternative. When Jesus was arrested the crowd was ugly and distrustful of Christ. Some may have even been frightened of what was happening. Had Peter not denied Christ and claimed to have known Him as a follower the chances are he would have been arrested and hung from the nearest tree. The same fate would have awaited the other Disciples who fled.

So ... who would have built the Church after this?

God allowed the denial to happen so that Peter survived the original upheaval which followed Christ's arrest and Crucifixion. Peter and the Disciples had to survive to build the Church.

Thomas too knew Jesus well. Yet he disbelieved the Resurrection. Just as bad as Peter's denial, some might say.

As a result, Jesus appeared to the Disciples a second time and gave Thomas the chance to put his finger in the wounds of Christ. The event was witnessed by the other Disciples and recorded in history.

Unwittingly, by his action Thomas did us all a favour. Had he not doubted we would have lost a valuable piece of evidence of Christ's Resurrection. By doubting, Christ's re-appearance to the Disciples and what He said to Thomas has been recorded for us to read and believe.

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Paul's job was easy. He had to seek out and persecute the early Christians. He witnessed and approved of Stephen's death and was eager to follow on with more arrests and deaths in order to stifle the Good News of Christ. Now how bad is that? And God allowed it to happen.

Yet God had other plans. He could use the energy and eagerness of such a zealot. There's no better spokesman for a cause than a person who has been converted. So God literally shook the man off his horse and made him blind in the process. The result, as they say, is history.

In all three cases God allowed bad to happen and turned it for the good.

A great reminder when things don't go so smoothly for us at times.

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ARE YOU INVITED TO JESUS' WEDDING?

In Matthew Chapter 22:1-14 Jesus tells a parable about a king preparing a wedding feast for his son. He invites many guests who do not turn up, so eventually, he invites all the people his servants can find in the streets until the wedding hall is full of guests.

In this story, the King is God. And His Son getting married is Jesus; marrying His Church here on earth - this means everyone, you and I included.

We are all invited to God's Kingdom, but many don't answer the call.

At the end of this parable there's an intriguing bit. The king enters the hall and sees a man not wearing wedding clothes. He is angry with him and gets him tied up and thrown out into the street.

Now this seems rather harsh treatment for someone not wearing the right clothes. Until we stop and understand Jewish tradition.

Jesus was talking to the Jews who understood very well that there are special clothes to wear at weddings. Almost every family had such special clothes in case they were invited to a wedding; even the poor would either have such clothes or borrow some. No one would dare go to a wedding without special clothes. Even more important, traditionally the host of the wedding also provided special garments for those who did not have any, so they can borrow them for the occasion. So it was more offensive to the king for this guest to wear no garment.

This guest in the parable just did not bother; he showed disrespect to the king and his son; and was thus thrown out.

But how about us? What are our special clothes for our entry into God's Kingdom in Heaven?

Our wedding clothes are our good deeds here on earth. Whatever we do for anyone in need, however small, constitutes our wedding clothes.

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It is just not enough to spend a lifetime on our knees praying, or going to church, if our deeds are far from what is expected of us as followers of Christ.

Jesus said, "Not everyone who calls me Lord will enter the Kingdom of God, but only those who do what my Father wants them to do". Matthew 7:21.

In other words ... action not words.

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FACE TO FACE WITH ST PETER

St Peter opened the *Gates of Heaven* one morning to find an elderly woman waiting there.

"Ah ..." he said, "I wasn't expecting you so early. Normally guests start arriving at about mid-morning. Anyway ... what is your name?"

The woman gave her name and the old Saint put on his reading glasses and started typing on his computer. Moments later her details came up on the screen.

"Aha ... you've had a tough life I see ... I'm sorry to read all about it. You overcame many trials and tribulations and suffered many pains and heartaches ..."

The woman smiled feebly.

"You were generally very kind too ... and you prayed a lot. Often reciting the Rosary on your knees! I bet you have calloused knees ..." he laughed.

She blushed a little and said nothing.

He tapped at the keyboard a few times and then added, "generous too ... you gave to the poor as much as you could spare ..."

She looked down to the ground and said nothing.

"Oh ... Oh ..." he said with a frown, "what's this I read here? It is written in red; and underlined too ..."

"For almost a lifetime you have not forgiven someone ... why is that?"

She trembled a little and muttered, "That person hurt me very badly ..."

"That's true," said the Saint, "it says so here on my computer ..."

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"And the hurt never went away ..." added the old lady trying to justify her actions, "every time I remembered I hurt once again ..."

"Yes I know ..." interrupted St Peter, "it says so here ..."

"And that person never asked for my forgiveness either ..." continued the old lady sensing a reprieve.

"The thing is ..." interrupted the Saint once again, "you never actually wanted to forgive did you? You held on to the hurt as a crutch which in time became a stick to beat that person with ... not literally, but certainly in your mind.

"Every time you remembered the hurt you felt ill-will towards that person. Even though they may not have asked for forgiveness you would not have granted forgiveness if asked. In fact their lack of asking forgiveness itself became an instrument of growth for your crutches and the stick to beat him with."

She trembled, fearing the worst, and said nothing.

"Yet ... at all times, you recited Our Lord's own words 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespassed against us' and did not meant a word you said.

"He is very hurt by that!" admonished the Saint as gently as he could, "Our Lord has often been misquoted and this short phrase I fear is the most common misquotation of all."

At this the old lady began weeping uncontrollably.

"Our Lord, my Master, is very forgiving indeed ..." continued St Peter, "I know that from personal experience. Also on the Cross He forgave his oppressors. And a few days later He forgave Thomas too.

"As for the memories ... of course He still has them. Every time He looks at the scars on His hands and feet, and on His side, the memories come

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back to Him as painful and raw as if it were yesterday. And every time He remembers, He forgives once again!"

She wiped her eyes with her veil and continued weeping.

The Saint switched off his computer and shut the Gates behind him as he re-entered Heaven.

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MARY'S LEGACY

When Mary was visited by the Angel Gabriel all those years ago, times were very different.

It would have been a great scandal for an un-married woman to become pregnant. It was even more outrageous to claim He is the Son of God. That would have been blasphemy surely!

Yet despite her fears of shame, rejection and ridicule, not to mention fear for her own safety, Mary trusted God and said "Yes".

She agreed to be the Mother of Jesus.

So, what is her legacy to us?

Obedience and trust.

Obedience and trust in God despite what must have been a very dangerous situation for her, and her family.

Are we that obedient and trusting when God speaks to us?

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JOSEPH'S LEGACY

Joseph is not mentioned often in the Bible. We read about him before the birth of Jesus when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and asked him to take Mary as his wife. (Matthew 1:18).

Imagine his dilemma. He was engaged to Mary when she found out she was due to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. At first he considered doing what many men with a pregnant girl friend whose baby is not theirs would have done - run a mile in the opposite direction.

Being an honourable man he decided to break the engagement privately so as not to disgrace her.

Then the angel appeared to him in a dream; and based on that dream alone he decided to marry Mary and raise her son as if He were his own.

He was there when Jesus was born in Bethlehem and we read about him when he took Jesus and Mary to Egypt to escape from Herod (Matthew 2:13) and then when they returned to Nazareth (Matthew 2:19).

He is also mentioned when the boy Jesus was twelve years old and found in the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41).

So as Jesus' foster father he was there during His early years protecting Him from Herod and providing a loving family for the Son of God.

What a wonderful man he must have been. Working quietly in the background, without much recognition, doing God's will in raising His Son on earth.

So, what is his legacy to us? Obedience and trust.

Despite what his common sense told him to do, he did not walk away from Mary. He trusted God and decided to stay with Mary. He decided to provide for her and a child who was not his. He taught the child carpentry

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and raised Him up as his own. May his obedience and trust be an example to us all.

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JOHN'S LEGACY

A man wandering in the desert, dressed in clothes made of camel hair, and eating locusts and wild honey. (Mark 1:4-8).

Not exactly sartorial elegance. More of an eccentric if you ask me.

Yet this was a man with a mission.

His mission - to tell everyone about Jesus. To prepare them for His arrival.

His name - John, the Baptist. In case you confuse him with another John.

An outspoken man who feared no one in his quest to do what God had asked him. He even dared to criticize the king, and paid dearly with his life for doing so. (Mark 6:14-29).

His legacy to us?

Courage and Obedience.

Despite living in dangerous times, this man had courage to speak out and tell the world about Jesus; and dared tell the King that he was wrong.

How often are we presented with the opportunity to speak about God, about our religion and our Christianity. Do we shy away and miss a good opportunity to witness for our Lord? Or have we got a tiny fraction of John's courage? And obedience?

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PETER'S LEGACY

What do we know about Peter?

He was a fisherman chosen by Christ as a disciple. He immediately left his nets by the sea shore and followed Jesus. (Matthew 4:18).

He can be a little impetuous and acting on impulse. When Jesus walked on water towards the boat Peter asked if he too could walk towards Christ. Jesus said: Yes, and Peter soon jumped into the lake, walked a few steps, then lost Faith and almost drowned. (Matthew 14:22).

He can talk without thinking. When Jesus taught His disciples that He was to die and then rise from the dead, Peter rebuked Christ, his own Master, and told Him this should not happen. (Matthew 16:21).

Days later, when Peter, James and John were up a high mountain with Jesus; and they saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus, again, Peter comes forward mouth first and suggests he builds three tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. What was he thinking? Having a picnic up there? (Matthew 17:1).

When Jesus was arrested, Peter really lost his head. He drew out his sword and attacked the high priest's servant. (John 18:10).

Yet, not so long later he denied knowing Jesus three times. (Luke 22:54).

So there you have it. A hothead, a loud mouth, who denies His Master even though he said he never would.

Yet, he then went on to lead Christ's early church to greater things.

So, what is Peter's legacy to us?

It is this: God is forgiveness. No matter what you have done, no matter what your sin is, if you truly repent and promise not to repeat your sin,

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God will forgive you and help you to greater things. Peter denied God Himself. Yet, through forgiveness and love, became God's leading light here on earth.

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PAUL'S LEGACY

Paul stood there as Stephen was stoned to death. He approved of this murder because he hated followers of Christ. (Acts 8:1).

Paul tried to destroy the early church, throwing believers into jail. (Acts 8:3).

He traveled far and wide persecuting the early "followers of the Way of the Lord". (Acts 9:1-2).

As he approached Damascus looking for early Christians a light from the sky blinded him and Jesus spoke to him. (Acts 9:3-6).

And the rest, as they say, is history.

Paul was converted; he became a Christian and went on to preach about Jesus in many lands, even though he himself had never met Jesus personally.

So, what is his legacy to us?

Apart from being the greatest preacher the early church ever knew?

It is this: Sometimes, God grabs people by the lapels and shakes them violently to make them listen.

Why does God do this to some people and not others we will never know. Not now at least.

Perhaps He sees in some people a talent or a gift which He could well use. After all, why should a gifted person be left to wander and become prey to the devil? Why shouldn't God use this talent?

So, like He did to Paul, God gets that person's attention and asks them whether they wish to serve Him by spreading the Word.

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

Has He spoken to you yet? Have you replied? Don't wait until He draws your attention more positively !!!

MORE TIME FOR REFLECTIONS

THOMAS' LEGACY

I visited some friends the other day. It was a warm evening so we sat in the garden chatting. Moments later they both went into the house to prepare some refreshments and left me in the garden alone.

I sat admiring the view when suddenly out of the bushes came a fox. He moved around for a few seconds then hid again.

When my friend came out I told him about the fox. "Can't be a fox" he said, "we live too far into town for a fox to come here ..."

I said nothing and continued our conversation. Minutes later out came the fox again for a short while.

My friend shouted to his wife still in the house "We've got a fox in the back garden!"

Her exact reply was "Can't be a fox, we live too far into town for a fox to come here!"

He called her a doubting Thomas and laughed it off.

Later that evening I thought about Thomas the disciple. What a service he did for Christianity without realizing it. By doubting Christ's resurrection Jesus appeared again, and this time Thomas saw Him. The whole event was witnessed by the other disciples and recorded for us to read years later.

Had Thomas not doubted, we would have lost a valuable piece of evidence of Christ's resurrection.

Jesus said to him, "Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!" John 20:29.

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JOSEPH'S LEGACY

Jacob had twelve children and he loved Joseph the most. We've all probably heard of Joseph and his many coloured coat. It's a wonderful story you can read in *Genesis Chapter 37*.

Joseph's brothers were so jealous of him that one day they sold him to some traders on the way to Egypt. They soaked his coat in blood and told Jacob that a wild animal had killed him.

In Egypt Joseph was sold as a slave, and even landed in prison on false charges.

Now Joseph had a special gift. He could interpret dreams. One day the King of Egypt had a dream and he called for Joseph to interpret it.

Joseph predicted seven good years with great harvests followed by seven years of drought. He suggested the King appoints a man to store enough food during the good years and to apportion it amongst the population during the drought.

The King was so impressed with Joseph that he appointed him to this task. Suddenly, from slave Joseph became one of the most important persons in Egypt and beyond.

Years later, during the drought, his brothers came to Egypt to buy corn. Joseph recognized them, (even though they didn't recognize him), and eventually, he forgave them and was re-united with his father.

So, what is Joseph's legacy to us?

It is this. Sometimes in life we go through some very rough times indeed. Our whole world collapses around us and everything seems to go wrong. No matter what we do. No matter how much we pray. Things don't seem to get any better.

We feel that God has abandoned us. Or that perhaps He doesn't exist at

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all.

But He does exist. And He does care.

What He is doing when we're living through difficult times is to lead us somewhere else.

He wants us to move on to new environments, new situations, new places, or even meet new people.

Through our difficulties we get to meet people we've never met before. And through our actions, perhaps without even realizing it, we influence those we meet. They may see in us an example to follow. We may do or say something that makes them stop and think. And perhaps change their ways for the better.

Through our difficult times we may even change ourselves - for the better.

Consider what Joseph went through. Hated by his brothers. Sold into slavery. Falsely imprisoned.

But he had to go through all that. Otherwise he would not have been in Egypt to interpret the King's dream and save millions from starvation years afterwards.

His suffering led to the good of many in Egypt and beyond throughout the drought years.

Whatever you may be suffering right now may well lead to the good of others, and probably to your own good, in years to come.

God has brought you here to where you are. It may be bad right now. But trust Him.

He will lead you through it. To better times for you and others. You should be happy to be of service to Him.

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YOUR LEGACY

At a Christian seminar the lecturer was talking about our contributions to this world and he asked his audience: "Imagine you are lying dead in your open coffin and your friends and relatives are passing by to pay their respects. What do you want them to say about you?"

The first volunteer said: "I hope they say I was a good family man and that I helped people less well off than myself."

A second participant said: "I hope they say I used my skills as a doctor to help others."

The third man said: "I hope they say - I've just seen him move !!! "

What will they say when you're gone? What is your legacy to this world?