

Faithfulness

Several years ago we were about to leave the community house of the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary in Darmstadt. The Sister there who had helped us so much in the early days of our community was, by then, a very old lady. One of our Sisters said to her impulsively, "Would you give me one last blessing before we leave?" Without hesitation Sister Divina laid her hand on the one who had made the request and prayed that she might have the gift of faithfulness. It was a never-to-be forgotten experience. When that same Sister received, typed neatly on a piece of card, the fruit of the Spirit "faithfulness" at New Year, a new resolve was made to be faithful to the Lord to the end of her days!

For some of us it is many years since we ran into the arms of Jesus and our enthusiasm for our new found faith knew no limits. If we were especially blessed we had other like-minded folk around us and the Christian life was one big adventure. What happens when those days begin to fade, and our eagerness begins to falter? Perhaps our energy for adventure begins to abate, or other priorities crowd into our lives. Responsibility begins to weigh us down either in our work or with our family, and it could be both. Slowly but surely the Lord Jesus is no longer the centre of our life. The words of Jesus to the church in Ephesus apply, "You have forsaken your first love".¹ We know from the previous verses that the teaching in this church was, as we would say, sound. If there is no love, and love for others begins with love for God, then it avails us little even if we are able to quote the Bible, chapter and verse! The Lord does not judge us on our intellect but on our love.

There is a way back and some of us have to find it not once but many times. The Lord says, "Remember the height from which you are fallen".² Look back and recall the joy that you once experienced. "Believe in the darkness what you have seen in the light."³ Make time to pray. Find a quiet place and if that is impossible at home find it someplace else, outside on a good day, an empty church or even a store room at work and ask forgiveness. Recalcitrant Israel was reminded by the prophet Hosea that the Lord loved him as a parent loves his child. "When Israel was a child I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son".⁴ Those arms of love were still open wide for his people to return and they are open to us.

The joy of our first love may not return but peace will flood our heart. We will be humbled by our own faithlessness. The Lord is calling for a humble, loving people who don't know the answer to everything but do know in whom they believe. "I am beginning to see", wrote Lilius Trotter, "that it is out of a low place that one can best believe."⁵ "It is water poured down into a low channel. That can rise to a fountain. Faith that comes from the depths has a spring in it." "Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God."⁶

Faith is not feelings – our feelings can swing like a pendulum. It is faithfulness that counts. We have only to look to Nigeria where faithful pastors stay with those who have been unable to flee not knowing whether they will be murdered in the night by Boko Haram, or Coptic priests in Syria refusing to leave the remnant of their flock and actively evangelising in the face of the advance of Islamic State. It isn't a legalistic loyalty that drives them but love for the Lord and a humble dependence on him.

There will always be those who despise the Faithful Ones. John Bunyan describes how Christian and Faithful must travel through Vanity Fair on their journey to the Celestial City. “The people of the Fair ---- said that they were fools, some said they were lunatics; and some they were outlandish men.” “They (the pilgrims) naturally spoke the language of Canaan; but they that kept the Fair were men of the world.” “These pilgrims set very light by all their wares.” --- “signifying that their trade and traffic was in heaven”. The two are brought before Judge and Jury. Pronounced guilty, Faithful is condemned to death but the writer comments, “I saw a chariot --- waiting for Faithful, who was taken up into it ---- to the Celestial City.”⁷



“Can he have followed far,
who has no wound or scar.”⁸

¹ Rev.2:4 NIV

² Rev. 2:

³ A Blossom in the Desert Liliastrotter

⁴ Hosea 11:1 NIV

⁵ A Blossom in the Desert Liliastrotter

⁶ Isaiah 50:10 NIV

⁷ The Pilgrim's Progress John Bunyan

⁸ Amy Carmichael