

Radio Maria - 4 27.1.23 Faith in God.

Faith is not a verb. Its verb is believing. I believe you – I trust you.

I believe you are human, belief as perception – as we saw two weeks ago.

I believe in values, goes a step further. It is a commitment to living virtues. My claim can be monitored by anyone interested in my life.

To say that I believe in God goes further than stating that there is a God. “To believe in” is a statement of commitment. It is a **be-live-in God**.

As is my custom, I will share my **believing in** across the PIES. Do phone in if you have a question. The number will be sent to you during the music break.

I shall start with three, perhaps for some, initially shocking, statements.

1. God is nothing, no ‘thing’. God is not a concept.

2. God does not exist. God is.

3. God is not omnipotent. He can’t do ‘everything’.

It may seem pedantic, if not heretical, to state that God does not exist. Nevertheless, it happens to be philosophically true. Spotting the sharp difference between being and existing sheds light on the reality of God.

The verb ‘to exist’ comes from the Latin *existere* ‘to come into being’; from *ex-* ‘out’ + *sistere* ‘take a stand’.

God does not ‘exist’. God has not surfaced from some previous reality. God simply is. Timeless though also in time.

Creation is here because God decided, again to use an anthropomorphism, to create with the Big Bang, some 13.7 billion years ago – and keep it in existence ever since.

God is creator, not a procreator recycling existing stuff. Everything created exists. It has become. It came into being from nothing. No wonder we have crises of identity and worth, until we accept who put us here and why.

God is not omnipotent - ‘almighty’ in the sense so many people think. Though Scripture tells us that God is indeed almighty (Gen. 18, 14; Job 42, 4; Mt 19, 26; Lk 1, 37), the words ‘almighty’ and its Latin original form ‘omnipotent’ are words that have caused a massive amount of misunderstanding.

Never forget many words are dynamic rather than static. Their meaning evolves and even drastically changes. Think “gay”, think “wicked”. Even ‘nice’ (*)

(*) Nice one: to express approval.

Nice to meet you: a polite formula used after being introduced to someone.

Nice work if you can get it: informal expression of envy

Nice distinction: a fine difference

In Middle – Chaucerian - English, ‘nice’ meant ‘stupid’; from Old French, from Latin *nescius* ‘ignorant’, from *nescire* ‘not know’.

A subtle insult in 21st century among the cognoscenti may be: “He is a very nice man, as Chaucer would have put it.”

Originally, I believe the authors of the Jewish *Tanakh* - what we call the Old or Original Testament - used the term ‘omnipotent’ to underpin their monotheism. There is only one God, responsible for all there is.

Later on, the meaning of the word ‘omnipotent’ morphed to ‘God can do anything. Nothing is impossible with God’. Not so.

Clearly, God cannot make a square triangle. God cannot make both opposing teams win the same match, or make two negatively charge electrons become attracted to each other. God cannot make any human being love God, or love anyone else for that matter. This fact does matter. It matters massively.

If everything was ‘God’s will’, we would not be responsible for anything. God’s respectful love has given us the possibility of going against what God wants us to do, causing chaos.

During their Babylonian Exile, which, according to the prophet Jeremiah (29:10) lasted 70 years, the Chosen People faced the polytheism of their captors. A temptation. Hence the first Chapters of Genesis. ‘The one God has created everything. Everything is good. Humanity very good.’

Foolishness – stupidity, lack of enlightenment – demonstrated by listening to a snake, brought evil into the world. Not God’s responsibility, but ours, our humanity’s.

Little children, typically imagine that like their daddy, God is able to do anything. As they pass through their teens, their father’s omnipotence- and thus God - sink into the sands of time. Perhaps - soon after Confirmation for Catholics - God is left behind as a childish toy. As they leave their teens and ‘all that’ behind, some – perhaps thanks to a retreat or spiritual guidance, maybe even reading a few good books - discover, this time round, the real God.

Another persistently marketed God is the teenager’s parent who rewards you if you are good and punishes you, gates or grounds you in Hell forever, if you misbehave. This ‘god’ is just as spurious.

However, though good works do not save us, the virtue of love, responding to God’s love - acquired and expressed through good works - does.

I repeat myself because it is so important, the God of the atheists is a non-existent God.

Remember how Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Ex 3,12-14)

God, by definition the uncreated creator, is pure being. God simply is. That being sustains our existence. God is within the whole of space-time; not least as the giver in the gift.

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We are pilgrims travelling through space-time to Eternity wherein God dwells.

God is not our projection. Was there creating since the Big Bang some 13.7 billion years ago. Humanity in its various forms, has been on this planet less than two million years.

I believe God was God before becoming The Creator. I will ascertain if this is true once I see the Divine Presence face to face.

We have discovered human burials some 50,000 old, evidence belief in some form of life after death.

Arguments against the reality of a benign, loving creator are, for some, carnivorous animals and for many more the existence of evil on earth.

However, accepting I cannot answer these objections realistically, I cannot deny the reality of God.

Thanks to Jesus Christ, we know that internally, God is a community, a trinity.

Father...creator

Son.....friend, brother

Holy Spirit.... mother, motivator. Not mentioned in Eucharistic Prayer One. Recently, during my lifetime, The Holy Spirit, *Ruach* in Hebrew, Feminine – has been given greater prominence.

Ask yourself: "Who comes first? Father or son? Parent or child? (Handclap) Which hand clapped first? ([Handclap)

Exactly. Neither. Both. Parent gives childhood the instant a child give parenthood.

A mutual gift.

No husband, no wife. No wife, no husband.

Equality.

God lives by giving.

In God, as in marriage, the 'I' and the 'you' becomes a 'we'.

The pronoun people tend to use when referring to God is He/Him. To my mind, an inaccurate shorthand for a mystery beyond our intellectual grasp.

Worship God liturgically and even more importantly through helping God make this world a better place, looking after SON. We are invited to be his arms and hands.

In my office, I have, attached to the bookcase, a wooden statuette: body and legs of Jesus. The arms must have come adrift ages ago. The wood is old. I have it there to remind me of my purpose here on earth.

The Rule of St Benedict begins with Ausculta, listen - to The Word. For a start in and through *lectio divina* which consists of five steps.

1. Select a Scripture passage upon which to reflect. ...

5. Still yourself and rest in the loving embrace of your Maker.

As well as reading the Bible, I try to read my neighbourhood. Sensitive to God's presence in my Self. Others and Nature, urges me to help God help this S.O.N.

That something like the complicated structure of a human eye evolved without any Designer-directed evolution beggars' belief. It stretches credulity well beyond breaking point. Take the human ear. Or the human brain. How can these be products of random energy inputs into a primeval sludge on planet earth? Though the brain is far more complex than the ear, when giving a lecture, I use a diagram of the human ear, with its hammer, anvil, stirrup, cochlea and semi-circular canals.

Our mind is far more mysterious than our brain with its 86 billion neurons structured to enable me to think and write, imagine, dream and remember; intuitively sense what is there before I can even say what I think or am going to do.

It turns out, I am fine company. Albert Einstein wrote, "My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind."

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb 11, 1)

Faith evolves. We see as we are. If, after an accident all witnesses sate exactly the same facts, the police are suspicious they have all ben rehearsed.

We see, we imagine as we are. Living in villages, people had their own god protecting where they lived. Hence polytheism. When towns developed, heno-theism arrived. "Our God is better than your God." Deuteronomy 3:24 put it as 'O Lord God, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand; for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as Yours?' Psalm 86:8 states that "There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord, Nor are there any works like Yours."

Once the Chosen People experience an empire, seemingly without frontiers, they arrived at Monotheism. Yahweh was like the emperor. In Isaiah 46:9 we read "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me."

VTW. Eternity is now. Palpably just a heartbeat away

Need to die to experience God fully. Death is birth into divine eternity. As after my first stage of life . Three stages, womb, breathing, after death with God.

Eternal life is a fact, not a mere wish. Positive if we have become capax Dei, capable of life with God.

Negative if we are unable to live by love and thus in self-generated solitary, eternal confinement.

Selfishness is like drinking salt water. Serving is like fine wine, Ubuntu, good for those I serve and very good for me.

“No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” John Dunne (1572-1631)

We need others to become our fuller self. As *servus servorum dei*, I help generate unity.

Mt 25,40 “What you do to the least of mine, you do to me.”

Commitment to God implies commitment to the way of life God has taught us, through Jesus The Christ and fine-tuned by The Church under the inspiration of the Spirit.

If I stay committed to God, I cannot just survive in our society riddled with hedonism, materialism, consumerism and sexual free for all. I have to do my best to help people thrive in whatever their culture throws at them.

Living committed to God is enlightened self-interest.

I did not seek out God. As I mentioned last week, God found me.

One day on holiday in Eriskay (Outer Hebrides), August 1954, I decided to climb the hill, the highest point on Eriskay, passing on my way the skull and horns of a deceased sheep. At the top, I sat down, looked West across the Atlantic Ocean. Suddenly something utterly unexpected happened. The only way I can put it is “I fell in love with infinity”. It was my Pentecostal Experience. I experienced the Divine Presence throughout my body.

I never asked for it, I never expected it. However, that moment — no idea how long it was before I climbed down that Benin Scathing peak of 185m — has stayed undiminished and fresh, glowing, solid still within my heart. Gradually, as the years went by, realised that that 'Infinity' was and is the One we tend to call 'God'.

That experience altered my life 180 degrees. Instead of trying to be naughty so as to be accepted as 'a part of the gang' I started to study hard, to strive to be good AND going to Mass every day before school.

Altruism, like a reciprocating engine, realises the joy that the more you give across the PIES, the more you receive, at least in your E and S.

In John's first letter, we are told that God is love. Now, love is BOTH a noun, “God is my love” AND a verb, “God loves me.”

I ought – as a duty love God. To be fulfilled, I should - I have to love God. I want to because I want to live ‘life to the full’ (Jn10,10).

As the elements within a molecule of water are always hydrogen and oxygen, no matter what temperature or texture that water may be, from super-heated steam to snow and ice, fog,

sweat and tears, so love's spiritual elements are two: appreciation and respect. Love – in all its forms, if it is real love, is underpinned by two elements: appreciation and respect. The danger in a long-lasting relationship of love, is familiarity – which can breed, if not contempt, a loss of respect. As evidenced by all those many marriages that fall apart.

Mind you, people do change not in who they are but how they are. Optimists become pessimists, energetic become lethargic; with time, occasionally dementia damages ability to think and communicate. God, alive in eternity in which there is no change, remains eternally the same even though Revelation has indeed evolved.

As in science, Revelation of facts and ethics progresses.

There are arrested developments of dogma.

Samaritans, stop short of prophets

Jews stop short of Jesus Christ

Nestorians stop short at the council of Ephesus

Monophysites - who believed that Jesus Christ's single nature remains altogether divine and He is not really human.

The Eastern Orthodox departed at The Council of Trent. The decree on marriage, as worded, was offensive to the Eastern-rite Christians, who regarded marriage as dissolved by adultery. Their thinking went along the lines of “In the sacrament of marriage, the bond is The Holy Spirit – who is unbreakable. Thus, if a marriage falls apart, its bond could not have been the Holy Spirit and thus is null and void, not a sacrament. Thus, OK to remarry.”

I remember - in 1990 - witnessing in Russia second weddings on Wednesday , not on Saturday, as first wedding.

Then there was the question whether or not it was acceptable to use unleavened bread for the sacrament of communion. The west supported the practice, while the east did not.

Old Catholics departed at Vatican 1. They could not accept the papal infallibility on questions of faith and morals.

Protestants are retrogressive, moving back from seven to just two sacraments.

The best love - divine love - is the kind that awakens the soul; that makes us reach for more, that plants the fire in our hearts and brings peace to our minds.

We just need to remember that, thanks to God's love, we are 'in Christ'. A fact mentioned 164 times in Pauline letters.

Love generates a single spirit: the 'we', the 'us'. Love is both self-directed and other-directed.

Both lover and beloved benefit. The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved; loved for ourselves, or on a bad day, loved in spite of ourselves.

A colleague, a companion or a neighbour, is one thing. A beloved is something else. Loving generates commitment. It is the difference between egg and bacon at breakfast. The hen is involved, the pig is committed.

Love is like sunshine striking stained glass. In the dark, it is black. Lit up, its colours come alive. Glow. The sun reveals its message, the reason it is there.

Taking a tour round the grounds of his friend's stately home – we are talking the August of 1928 – an Indian prince sees his host's teenage children playing tennis. "I could not get even my servants to do that in this heat," comments the Prince. The sweaty exertions make no sense, until the motivation, the love of the game, is clear.

Love nature, care for its ecology and you will exert yourself willingly and gladly. Your loves reveal the content of your heart. To love is no 'thing'. It is a relationship.

Traditionally, the word "love" has been seen to stand for seven ways or relating. There is

1. *Agapē*, the unconditional and enduring love of God for humans, as well as our reciprocal love for God. It is the highest form of love. A sub-section of this is at times referred to as *Pragma*, a love built on commitment, understanding and long-term interests, like building a family.

2. *Storge*, love of parents for children. It is often described as the most natural of loves.

3. *Philia*, love without romantic attraction occurs between friends – including family members. It occurs when both people share the same values and respect each other. It is commonly referred to as "brotherly love". Colleagues can become allies-in-life and, if they share your values, interests and objectives, some may end up as authentic friends; "alter egos".

4. *Philautia* is self-love. Though all too often sneered at as egocentric, it is vital if we are to "love our neighbour as our self" (Mt 22, 39) and live the universally approved Golden Rule expressed in the Gospel as, "Treat others as you would like them to treat you." (Mt 7,12)

5. *Ludus*, "game" or "school" in Latin, is a light-hearted, flirtatious love that wants to have fun with each other, to tease, and play harmless pranks on each other. *Ludus* is child-like and commonly found in the early stages of a relationship.

6. *Eros* is erotic, sexual, or passionate love. It is often all about need and it is more about the person who is feeling sexually aroused than it is about the person who is the focus of that love. (With a high "A" rating and a low "R".)

7. *Mania* is an obsessive love style likely to do something crazy, such as stalking. The movie 'Fatal Attraction' focused on this type of love.

For me, when in 1 John 4, 8, I read that God is love, I sense that the first four of these loves can be identified in God.

I am both God's lover AND beloved. Lover because beloved. Therefore, alive in my right brain, I move into action through the left. I know I am here to help God heal the world.

"Our heart is restless until it rests in you." The most compelling evidence for the reality of God is this simple quote by Saint Augustine.

God is love – as a transitive verb.

In the Old or Original Testament, God is referred to as father 11 times. In the New Testament it is 170 times. Jesus is Son and we are his brothers and sisters; thus, we have the same parent.

On our pilgrimage through space-time to eternity, God come to us in our friends – which should include our family – our neighbours, Parish community and liturgy, our work and sport colleagues. Thank God.

I thank God for creating us. May we use the gifts we have to help you, beloved God, make this world a better place.

Next week I plan to concentrate on 'Faith as believing in honesty, in telling the truth.'