

‘Faith’ is not a verb. You can’t faith anything. It is a noun whose verb is ‘to believe’; and that has at least four different connotations: trust, perception, values and commitment. When all four are satisfactory, as Martin Luther said, faith alone is enough to shape your life for divine-infinity: our eternal life which tends to be called Heaven.

There is Perception.

If you met me, you would probably believe me to be human. I might be an alien in disguise. But, probably, you would believe your senses and - were you American ,say “Good morning, Sir.”

If you saw yourself coming down the street as others see you, you would probably ask for an introduction.

In our Westminster Diocese there is a priest with a beautiful voice – and a skull, with its hair style both like mine. How often, when on our pilgrimage to Lourdes, a lady has come up to me and said “Father, you have such a lovely voice...” And I have to be honest and say, “that is Father Pat Browne, not me. I cannot sing!”

Remember the scene in the last chapter of John’s Gospel? The followers of Jesus were out there fishing, but they knew that it was Jesus cooking breakfast on the beach. They had that intuitive perception-belief.

Remember the scene in the final chapter of John’s Gospel? “Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.(Jn 21,12)

You may have come across the saying that” If you saw yourself coming down the road as others see you, you would probably ask for an introduction.”

Trusting your senses, as you interpreting sense data, you try to make sense out what impacts on your mind. “Land ahoy! Ouch, sorry it was a cloud.” “This food looks yummy. Urgh! It’s horrible.” ”Weren’t you at school with me? Ah, yes. I remember, you sat just behind me in 4A”

We see as we are, we are as we have become across our PIES, the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual components of our life.

To get to know someone, takes time. Some are good actors, some confidence tricksters.

A Premier League Chaplain confided in me that he was worried he had not approached its Senior Management Group when, having asked the 16 year olds in its Academy as they were coming in for lunch, he had heard “Simulation”: the magic to trick referees into believing they had been tripped in the penalty box. Most of the lads will not end up playing footy. The cheating-magic skills to earn penalties is likely to spill into the commerce and business cultures where they will work.

Some people are colour blind. Some God-blind. They cannot accept the reality that is there within everything: the relationship with The Creator keeping everything in existence. Faith 'sees' – accepts there is what is unseen (Hebrews, 11,1).

It 'sees' – senses, accepts - the giver in the gift, the creator in creation, the lover in the love. There must be a singer behind the song heard on the radio.

Scientists accept the link between what they see and the cause of what they experience. Think gravity and magnetism. You can't see these but no one now doubts they are there. This resonates with '*credo ut intelligam* – I believe so I can understand. As St Anselm of Canterbury put it, basing it on St Augustine of Hippo's, *crede ut intelligas*, believe that you may see.

Albert Einstein stated that science without faith is lame; faith without science blind. Faith and reason are better together. Science asks what? How - and perhaps when? It cannot answer the question? Why? What for?

As we saw last week, we perceive as we are across our PIES. If you are healthy and hungry, food is attractive. If you are car or seasick it is nauseating. It hasn't changed. You have.

Something similar occurs intellectually. Passing through puberty when sex is fascinating people often lose their faith in God so they can do what they instinctively would like to enjoy. Maturing – perhaps as they become a parent - their view of God might once again return.

Scientists now accept that there is Dark matter and Dark Energy – something like 90% of physical reality - about which they know nothing except that they must be there to explain the nature of our universe. Trained As an engineer – four years at Imperial College – makes me unable not to accept there must be a magnificent intellect – and imagination behind – within - creation. How else would we have our ear, our eye, our brain? If you think that these happened 'just like that', your faith is far stronger - and more absurd - than mine. Their complexity - and beauty - must be the result of an intelligently directed evolution. I cannot deny that there is a creator God.

To believe that, as Fred Hoyle put it, if "a junkyard contains all the bits and pieces of a Boeing-747, dismembered and in disarray and a whirlwind blows through the yard, what is the chance that after its passage a fully assembled 747, is there ready to fly?" Answer, zilch. It is absurd. Incredible. Incredible.

The beautifully elegant DNA structure happening by chance? Goodonyer if you believe that. I can't wait to meet the creator – which won't be long now at that I am almost 84! – and meet the intellect and imagination that is there.

Its also how we are emotionally. If you are feeling low, things look bleak. If high, you see things full of hope. On the chessboard of life there are black and white squares. I have decided to concentrate on the white- even though I am all too aware of what the black ones represent. It's a choice I have made.

There are many negative things around. However, think of the progress medicine and communication have made? If I concentrated on the negative I would probably have ended up an alcoholic.

Remember “*credo*”, “I believe” comes from inverting a vowel from “*cor do*”: “I give my heart”. (As ‘thrid’ became ‘third’. Yorkshire ‘Thridings’ became ‘Ridings’. ‘Brentwood’ came from ‘Burnt wood’, etc.)

We are free to see the world as positive and beloved by God – and thus live in hope – or negatively-atheistically and live in despair.

I love the “Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon” St. Francis of Assisi had a delightful take on things.

“Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord, All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all blessings.

To you alone, Most High, do they belong, and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour,
Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
In the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
And fair and stormy, all weather’s moods,
by which You cherish all that You have made.

Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,
So useful, humble, precious and pure.

Praised be You my Lord through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You my Lord through our Sister,
Mother Earth
who sustains and governs us,
producing varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.
Praise be You my Lord through those who grant pardon for love of You and bear sickness
and trial.

Blessed are those who endure in peace, By You Most High, they will be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord through Sister Death,
from whom no-one living can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Blessed are they
She finds doing Your Will.

No second death can do them harm. Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks,
And serve Him with great humility.”

There are different views on anything

Absence makes the heart grow fonder. Out sight, out of mind.

Nothing endured, nothing gained. Better safe than sorry

Opposites attract. Birds of a feather flock together.

The pen is mightier than the sword. Actions speak louder than words.

Never too late to learn. You can't reach an old dog new tricks.

The early bird catches the worm. The second mouse gets the cheese.

It's up to you to choose how to see the world.

Remember, Puberty – and fascination with sex - often blinds young folk's spiritually and they cease to be able to see - maybe better, sense – God's presence in their life.

Prejudice twists perception as does guilt. Fortunately, we may always choose to repent and - with this metanoia – see things – and others – as they are.

Remember how early on in Mark's Gospel the word 'repent' appears.(Mk 1, 15) "Repent and believe the good news" – that the Kingdom of God, though unseen, like love itself – is there. Repent- metanoia - not stop being bad but change the way you think, the way you see .

To get a clearer picture of somebody, may take time. Some people are great actors – and confidence-tricksters.

Everyone – even atheists – have to live by this faith.

One of my prayers is "Yesh, (my name for Yeshua ben Yosef) how do you see this?" "How would you react?" It helps me change my attitude to someone who seems - to me – to be negative.

I see Christ's presence there. The sinner beneath the sin. Not "You are a sinner. I am going to attack you. " But "You – like me are a sinner – how can we help each other?"

I see everything as a gift from God. One of the reasons I do my exercises every morning is that the giver is in the gift of my body and It is good to look after the gift of the giver. Misuse a gift insults the giver. That is the last thing I want to do!

As I walk from my bedroom towards the bathroom where I do my exercises, I always say "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." THAT changes everything.

Enriching to see God as Trinity.

The image I have is that a long way down the road there is a dark spot

Is it comes closer and passes by, I see there are in fact three walking in a row.

From a distance God is One. Close up, God is three.

Thanks to the incarnation of Jesus, we know God is Father - the *actus essendi*: the Son - the *actus dirigendi* and The Holy Spirit – the *actus amandi*.

God is wonderful, beautiful and mysterious. Our life on earth is an invitation to journey Godwards here on earth - here and now – towards eternity after we die.

To come into an intimate relationship with God everyone has their own path. I am blessed with my experience, when aged 15, I was on Eriskay in the Outer Hebrides. There, climbing up its small hill, I sat down, gazed Westwards and suddenly had an experience that I can only describe as “Falling in love with infinity.” It was my private, personal Pentecost. That experience is still there within my heart. It changed my life – radically.

As priest I try to help people to read the gospels and get to know the personality, the values, the character, the likes and dislikes of Yesh as he walked and talked, laughed and cried in his Public Life. Maybe you too will fall in love with him.

God is there, coming to us through wherever we are.

The silly story I have in my mind is the Single-Handed, Trans-Atlantic sailor with a powerful faith.

Suddenly a storm comes his way. His boat is tipped over. He ends up sitting on the upturned keel. “No problem. God will save me.”

An hour later a RN frigate comes close. “Can we help you, sir?” “No thanks, God will save me”

An hour later a cruise liner approaches. Same conversation. Six hours later – just before dusk - a Super tanker draws near. Same conversation.

At two am, he dies of hypothermia.

In heaven he meets Jesus angrily. “You let me down! I believed in you.” Jesus replies, “My dear, I sent you a frigate, a super-tanker and a cruise-liner. What more could I have done.”

Point taken?

At times, older ladies have come up to me with “I have been praying to God for help, but He has done nothing.” To which I replied “How have you survived?” “Oh, thanks to my family, friends, neighbour and Parish.”

To which I reply, “It was God in all those that helped you. Thank God for all your support.”

Perception! If we can see God in creation, how rich our life can be. The beauty, the excitement, the fun of living your life with God! With a Christian faith, our life is immensely enriched.

In my trade as priest, I try to help people sense the divine presence so they can have, what Jesus promised them “Life to the full.”(Jn10,10)

It is not always easy to sense the presence of God. There are those “Dark nights of the soul.”

Jesus on the cross talks with his father “Why have you forsaken me.?” Jesus knows God is there, though utterly unfelt.

If I close my eyes I cannot see what is there in front of me. It is there. If I cannot feel god's presence, God is still there.

"Domine ut videam!" Lord, that I may see. As Bartimaeus begged (Mark 10,46-52).

Reality is one thing. Perception, realisation of that reality is something else.

When fog comes, we need to walk one step at a time until, eventually, we come out into the clear.

St Mother Theresa of Calcutta, lived the last there years of her life in spiritual darkness.

Thinking of my eye, ear and brain, I know that God must be there. The creator is constantly in creation. – which has five dimensions: three spacial, one temporal and one divine. Thanks to that divine one – God's presence in everyone around me - I can love the sinner even as I reject the sin.

There was lovely woman – in Crnwall – a great friend of the family. She had made a few serious mistakes in her life. Standing in kitchen with a mug of black coffee in the my hand, I tried t convince her that God forgave her and that the past was but a rehearsal for the present.

She would have none of it.

Then, into the kitchen burst her four year old son, Luke.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, I blurted out "But you forgive Luke, don't you?"

"Of course, I do. I am completely responsible for him. Without me, he would not be here."

Slowly a lovely smile swept across her face. She had – and I am sure still has (even though I have not seen her for decades as she moved to South Africa) – a fine mind.

I often use the little story of the four workers on a building site.

Along comes a social science undergraduate and asks each one in turn, what they are doing.

1. "Can't you see, I am mixing concrete?"

2. "Clearly, I am building a house."

3. "I am earning a living."

4. "I like to think I am helping God build a home for a family"

Which of the four is correct? The forth is enjoying a richer life than the other three. His view includes yet transcends their perception of reality.

Here I am giving this talk. I am enjoying myself, keeping my brain active to postpone dementia, and, I hope, helping people see their life in a richer, deeper, more spiritual way.

Going shopping, cooking, cleaning, looking after a ninety year old with dementia... it's all helping God make this world a better place. With my perception-faith, I seem to age more slowly.

Try to repent, to make a paradigm shift, to see things more as Jesus of Nazareth saw them will enrich your life.

To see yourself as “*Servus servorum Dei*” – as the Pope official is, makes life a joy.

Seeing death as birth into divine eternity, makes the future attractive rather than scary or depressing.

However, remember that your view is partial and maybe different from those around you.

I like that story of the blindmen and the elephant.

There stood an elephant. The blind men stepped forward to touch the elephant that was the subject of so many arguments.

The first blind man reached out and touched the side of the huge animal. "An elephant is smooth and solid like a wall!" he declared. "It must be very powerful."

The second blind man put his hand on the elephant's limber trunk. "An elephant is like a giant snake," he announced.

The third blind man felt the elephant's pointed tusk. "I was right," he decided. "This creature is as sharp and deadly as a spear."

The fourth blind man touched one of the elephant's four legs. "What we have here," he said, "is an extremely large cow."

The fifth blind man felt the elephant's giant ear. "I believe an elephant is like a huge fan or maybe a magic carpet that can fly over mountains and treetops," he said.

The sixth blind man gave a tug on the elephant's coarse tail. "Why, this is nothing more than a piece of old rope. Dangerous, indeed," he scoffed.

The gardener led his friends to the shade of a tree. "Sit here and rest for the long journey home," he said. "I will bring you some water to drink."

While they waited, the six blind men talked about the elephant.

"An elephant is like a wall," said the first blind man. "Surely we can finally agree on that."

"A wall? An elephant is a giant snake!" answered the second blind man.

"It's a spear, I tell you," insisted the third blind man.

"I'm certain it's a giant cow," said the fourth blind man.

"Magic carpet. There's no doubt," said the fifth blind man.

"Don't you see?" pleaded the sixth blind man. "Someone used a rope to trick us."

Their argument continued and their shouts grew louder and louder.

"Wall!" "Snake!" "Spear!" "Cow!" "Carpet!" "Rope!"

"Stop shouting!" called a very angry voice.

It was the Rajah, awakened from his nap by the noisy argument.

"How can each of you be so certain you are right?" asked the ruler.

The six blind men considered the question. And then, knowing the Rajah to be a very wise man, they decided to say nothing at all.

"The elephant is a very large animal," said the Rajah kindly. "Each man touched only one part. Perhaps if you put the parts together, you will see the truth. Now, let me finish my nap in peace."

When their friend returned to the garden with the cool water, the six men rested quietly in the shade, thinking about the Rajah's advice.

"He is right," said the first blind man. "To learn the truth, we must put all the parts together. Let's discuss this on the journey home."

That's why I like to read and discover how others see our one world.

Thanks to Jesus Christ, God, who was always with us but seemed to be outside creation, was palpably here with us.

So, read, study, discuss, pray and you may gradually enrich your life and in practice be what you were baptised to be: *alter Chrstus*, Another Christ.

It is all a matter of perception, of seeing things. A matter of the quality of faith, of belief.

Keep on going God-wards.

Thanks to God's love, I can admit my mistakes.

Christ is everywhere – including my conscience. He is the *modus dirigendi*, steering my life.

When I was at Imperial College, I did a bit of rowing. It taught me the blatant fact that we row as we live facing backwards. However, the Cox could see where we were going.

Rowing is a metaphor for life. In both we see the past but not the future. For me, Jesus is the Cox of my body, my boat, as I row towards the end of my life. He keeps me going God-wards. God guides but I have to put in the effort. Faith gives me roots and wings. A firm foothold and a delightful hope.

I can't do much. But what I do can make a huge difference. Let's end with The Star Fish story.

A young girl was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. When she came to each starfish, she would pick it up, and throw it back into the ocean. People watched her with amusement.

She had been doing this for some time when a man approached her and said, "Little girl, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can't save all these starfish. You can't begin to make a difference!"

The girl seemed crushed, suddenly deflated. But after a few moments, she bent down, picked up another starfish, and hurled it as far as she could into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied, "Well, I made a difference for that one!"

The old man looked at the girl inquisitively and thought about what she had done and said. Inspired, he joined the little girl in throwing starfish back into the sea. Soon others joined, and all the starfish were saved.

If today I have helped one star-fish – like Mary of St Albans - preparing this talk and giving it will have been worthwhile.

May you accept all God's blessing until we meet again next week.