

2nd SUNDAY OF EASTER

Thomas – or Doubting Thomas as he has been unfortunately labeled - underwent a crisis of faith. Many people undergo a crisis of faith. Tolstoy is a good example, except his was a crisis of meaning too.

In 1879 he was fifty one years of age. He had every reason to be satisfied with himself. His two great novels, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, were written. If he had written nothing else these would have assured him an exalted place in the annals of world literature. The writing of these had enabled him to give expression to his genius and creativity. He should have been happy. Yet he was feeling miserable. He felt that his life was meaningless. One question haunted him: “Is there any meaning in my life that will not be destroyed by death ?”

It was a painful and dangerous time for him – he contemplated suicide. He searched for an answer to his questions in every area of human knowledge. He searched persistently, day and night, like a dying man seeking salvation. But he found nothing.

Then he turned to the beliefs of Christians. He had been brought up in the faith but had long since abandoned it. These beliefs repelled him and seemed meaningless in the mouths of people who led lives in contradiction to them. But these same beliefs attracted him and seemed sensible as he saw people who lived by them.

So it was that he was drawn back into them and found them full of meaning. He said:

“I thought that there was no sure truth in life. But then I found a sure source of light. I found it in the Gospel, and was dazzled by its splendour. In the teachings of Jesus, I found the purest and most complete doctrine of life. For two thousand years the lofty and precious teaching of Jesus has exercised an influence over men in a way unequalled by anyone else. A light shone within me and around me, and this light has not abandoned me since.”

Some people are born into a religious faith, and with the passage of the years find this faith increasingly strong and sustaining. To possess a faith like that is a tremendous blessing. I have to say that when my dad died a few weeks ago, that very simple but strong faith not only comforted him during his illness and enabled him to face his death with dignity - but it made our own grieving so much easier to cope with. I said at the time that I think he had a much stronger faith than his eldest son. But for others

faith is a constant struggle. Indeed, some people may have to undergo a crisis in order to arrive at a deep and personal faith. Obviously, for many that never happens.

Only faith can answer the most important and profound questions of life. I reckon there is a real longing, a real yearning, within all human beings for “something else” beyond the here and now. But we mustn’t expect faith to clear everything up. Just because we believe doesn’t mean we know all the answers. But we don’t need to know all the answers. Faith is trust, not certainty.

The story of Doubting Thomas brings home to us just how frail is the human container in which the gift of faith is carried. And it also shows us that Christian faith is essentially faith in a person who loves us – and has the wounds to prove it. At the heart of biblical faith is not only the faith we have in God, but the faith God has in us.