

Perhaps the deepest irony, or mystery, of our faith is that when it is fulfilled God disappears from sight. The danger then becomes that we fill this 'space' with the imagery of faith rather than the fact of it, with the things of God, rather than allowing God to be in us as we are in God. When the devout men of Jerusalem from every nation hear the disciples speaking in a language they can each understand, I would suggest that what they are hearing is the language of their common humanity; the language, that is, that God speaks to us all in the fact of our creation and existence in God. What this period of isolation may have helped us to do is to re-connect with this common createdness which our attachment to the 'things' of the faith, and of the world, has obscured or confused. We thought we were all different people, with different hopes and fears, each with a language of our own, only to discover that what affects one person is important to us all; that there is a language that transcends our ethnic and national and economic boundaries. What we are hearing throughout the world is that most basic of all languages, the language of love; both in the recognition of its lack and in the many examples of self-giving which have affected us all. So there is another way to live. The great good will which has been allowed to surface in this difficult time, is indicative of our true nature as creatures made, not to hate and destroy, but to nurture and to love, and it doesn't need a religious language, necessarily, to express itself. Or, in the words of the Dominican, Herbert McCabe:

This is the task of preaching... God is not part of the world, God is the unfathomable mystery of love by which the world is; there are no gods, there is only this love. And when we preach the gospel in these terms, the terms of our (Dominican) tradition, our hearers will indeed always be puzzled. They will say: Is this what the Church teaches? Where is the religion, where is the piety, where are the gods? Where is the special language of Church things? If we speak as the Spirit has given us utterance our hearers will be bewildered because each will hear us speaking in his own language the wonderful things of God. (God Matters p.242)

This is a precious insight which we can so readily obscure once again with the 'imagery' of faith; with the rush to establish religion as a 'useful' and essential aspect of our everyday life. This is not to empty religion of its meaning but rather to re-calibrate our communication of it, for what we are called to communicate is not foreign to our human nature – an esoteric jungle of religious metaphor, but a reality we are all in touch with but which has escaped us in the confusion of our pre-Covid-19 lives; in the confusion, that is, with all those other gods, such as to have and hold, to 'get on', to dominate, to win, which has reduced God to one other god among many. What of Christ then?

Well, I'm reminded of that Christmas story of the boy who played the inn-keeper in a school nativity play, but couldn't bring himself to reject Mary and Joseph entirely and finds himself saying: 'I'm afraid you can't stay for the night but you *can* come in for a drink.' This is the sort of creative kindness which gives Christ all the entry he needs.

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