

He comes to us hidden and salvation consists in recognising him. A quote from Simone Weil, the French philosopher and mystic and culled by me from a couple of superb short stories or articles by Dom Laurence Freeman first published in the Tablet in 2007 and 2009. In these stories, Dom Laurence makes much of the idea that knowing Jesus for who he really is, is also about us being known by him. In the second article, it is only when Jesus calls Mary Magdalene by her name that recognition comes. And, in the first, it is the process of gift, or better, the dynamic of gift-giving which inspires this quote from Simone Weil:

Part of the ritual of gift-giving is to conceal the gift so as to accentuate the delight of eventually seeing it. The Fathers of the Church say that the Incarnation both reveals and hides divinity. The story that follows the nativity is a tragical farce of mis-recognition and misunderstanding. 'He comes to us hidden and salvation consists in our recognising him'. (p71 Beauty's Field)

So Dom Lawrence has book-ended the whole story of Christ here, from birth to resurrection, as one of a gradual coming to awareness by others of who he really is which is also a gradual coming to awareness of who we are. We could as well use the word 'love' here for this process of unwrapping the gift of who God is to us and who we are to God. And the point of these stories is that most of the time we get it wrong. Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener and, although Peter has just named him as the Christ and Jesus warns them for the second time that that will mean his death and resurrection they, the disciples, immediately set about arguing among themselves which of them was the greatest. It's as if the process of gift is too much for them: they daren't unwrap it fully yet lest they find something they don't really want, something which doesn't quite match what they were really hoping for – someone perhaps who would not challenge but confirm their own pre-conceived hurts and prejudices. So they wrap the gift up again, unlike a child, perhaps, who cannot wait to be surprised. So there's something here about the recovery of lost innocence and of our true unsullied identity; the child, or person, in us who knows how to know and be known, to love and be loved, without all the damage that most of us acquire as life goes along and causes us to put up the barriers, to prevent the hurt becoming too much: barriers of pride and ambition, envy and self-satisfaction. Of course, we idealise the child here, for such barriers can go up from the word go. There's a heart-rending account of this in another of Dom Lawrence's stories when he visits an orphanage on Haiti and realises the child he visits is already too damaged in its isolation to ever fully recover:

He looks but he cannot trust. I put my hand out to touch him. He pushes it away with all his meagre force. It is trauma not tantrum. The traumatic experience – loss, abandonment, not understanding the withdrawal of love that shook his soul to its core is already inaccessible. What can clothe the suffering undergone before words and concepts are possible? Only love, over a period of time no one here can give, could reach so far back. (p88 Beauty's Field)

This is where Jesus' recognition of us matters more than our recognition of him. Where we, who can reflect and reason it all out, perhaps, can also hope that our lives are such that Jesus will eventually call us once more by name and we will recognise him. But this process of gift must also begin with one another – and the sooner the better lest, when we get to heaven, Christ says *I do not know you*.

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