

Several people have spoken recently of the inadequacy they feel as Christians – that they are not living up to the full demands of the Gospel: that they do not know how to live: that they should be doing more. We are all guilty in this respect if the Gospels are read as a series of demands, of do's and don'ts, of aims and objectives to be ticked off once achieved, a measure of success or failure. But that is not what Christ is about, it's a reading of the Good News which makes it Bad News instead. But how to counter this misperception without increasing our sense of guilt is tricky because telling someone that they haven't understood the gospels is but one more condemnation. There is a way through however which is not of our doing and in which confusion and doubt have a part to play, and can indeed be seen as a sign that God is at work in us after all . One is reminded of yesterday's passage from Isaiah

*'He said to me, 'You are my servant (Israel)
in whom I shall be glorified:'
While I was thinking, ' I have toiled in vain,
I have exhausted myself for nothing:'
And all the while my cause was with the Lord. (Is 49:326)*

But reading this passage and so many others from the Biblical narrative, is again in itself not enough for we can know in our heads that the Bible is all about feelings of desolation being followed by moments of consolation, that God will save us from this or that by one means or another, and ultimately Christ, and still feel inadequate. In short the change has to come from elsewhere. In a very useful book on 'the Dark Night of the Soul' by the 'distinguished scientist, spiritual counsellor, and best selling author Gerald E May' he has this to say of our ultimate goal and how to get there:

'It is the realisation of our essential union with God and creation that enables and empowers the practical living of love in the real situations of life. There is no missionary zeal here, no knee – jerk attempts to be helpful, no programmed acts of religious nicety, no knowledge of what to do for one's neighbour...' p 185

It's a way of unknowing, of allowing God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves – which is in effect everything, and what Jesus is trying to reassure his disciples of is possible if only they would relax and let God do the rest.

'Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid' - a constant refrain in the gospels, even when the confusion increases, when the night becomes darker or better more 'obscure' as we surrender our will and our desire to know and to control to another.

'Do not be afraid. For everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear.'

So darkness need not necessarily mean that God is absent but rather that God is still at work, and for God we can read Christ or 'love' – that Christ or love is still at work in us, and through us, even as we feel quite the opposite. We can again of course get too self-conscious about this, to which Gerald G May and such mystics as Theresa of Avila and John of the Cross might say, 'Just get on with it, do the next thing the day demands, if your desire is for God all the rest will follow.

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