

Saturday of Easter Week

In his book *Darkness at Noon* Arthur Koestler defined a Marxist understanding of an individual as a mass of one million divided by one million. A Christian understanding is radically different.

This is illustrated beautifully by Jesus' conversation with Mary Magdalene in the garden on the first Easter morning, when she thought he was the gardener. Until he spoke her name: 'Mary'. With that single utterance, she understood. Mary knew she was not talking to a gardener – but to a carpenter. She was talking to Jesus himself.

Names are vitally important. Introduced to church by a friend, Libby was surprised when the vicar addressed her by name on her second attendance at a service. It impressed her, and made her feel welcome. She returned – and stayed. Libby Lane's name became well known to many more people when she was consecrated as the Church of England's first female bishop, in York Minster on 26th January 2015.

The Christian Church is the largest movement in the entire history of the world. We are part of a huge number, drawn from every continent and stretching around the globe and down the centuries. But our risen Lord sees not a crowd, but *individuals*. Every one of us is precious in his sight. Each of us is different from all the others, and he knows us all by name. Indeed, he loves us so much that he died for each and every one of us.

Professor Keith Ward caught this when he said: '*Every individual atom of the universe is known fully and wholly by God. So the infinity of the knowledge of God goes along with the infinity of the love of God, which is unlimited.*'

After his resurrection, Jesus put a question to Simon Peter three times: 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Jesus puts this question to you and me, too.

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13.13

Second Monday of Easter

Some Christians today use a phrase that previous generations would not have recognised: 'thin places'. They mean a place where God seems more easily accessible; a place where spiritual things seem to interconnect with our daily lives. For some it might be a well-known holy place, such as the Isle of Iona, or the garden tomb in Jerusalem. For others it might be a much-loved church, or a peaceful garden.

You can make a temporary 'thin place' in your own home - a corner of a room where you place a cross, or one two candles; a Bible perhaps, maybe some flowers. Some of you may be reading this page in one such place.

Another way of coming at this is to reflect on the fact that we are 'amphibians'. No, we are not creatures who can live in air and water! But human beings inhabit two worlds - the physical world and the world of the Spirit. Quite often the physical dominates. I seem compelled to concentrate on a pain or a pleasure or the fact that I'm hungry or unhappy. Yet

just sometimes I have a sense of being surrounded 'by angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven'. We might describe these, not as 'thin places', but as 'thin moments'.

From conversations, I'm aware that for some people God almost always seems distant. For others the living Christ seems a constant close companion, and they chat with him throughout the day. For yet others a sense of God's presence comes and goes. I do not think these differences need worry us. Why not go with the flow? If or when your faith is strong, ask God to put it to use for the common good. When your faith is little more than a glowing ember, ask God to gently blow on it and bring it to life: '*Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me, melt me, mould me, fill me, use me ...*'

Jacob dreamed that there was a ladder reaching to heaven, and said: 'Surely the Lord is in this place - this is the gate of heaven.'

Genesis 28.12,16-17

Second Sunday of Easter

John 20.19-29