

The Power of Jesus

The blessedness of Jesus would be just a sideshow, like the beauty of the Hollywood star or the secluded splendour of the life of a monarch, without the bridge built by his benevolence to us. But benevolence is of little use if our problems remain insoluble. Christian faith thus requires a further resolution, the belief that the love of Christ can engage our difficulties, that in him the power of God can be exercised for his believers.

In the Scriptures this is described as essential in the vast majority of the miracle stories: Jesus sometimes makes this quite explicit, as in Mt 9:28 (*Do you believe I can do this? They replied: Lord, we do*) Mk 6:5 at Nazareth (*He could work no miracle there, beyond curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them: he was amazed at their lack of faith*). In Mk 9:14ff the incapacity of the disciples to expel a demon is greeted by Jesus with *Faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me!* and nearly every Synoptic miracle ends with Jesus' statement, *Your faith has saved you*.

The presentation of our needs to Jesus Christ in an attitude of faith is dependent on our trust in his power. This is really the sharp end of sacramental theology and liturgical practice: do we believe in the live power of Christ, present and accessible? If we do, then the sacramental realm has been opened to us. If we don't, we've got a journey of discovery ahead of us.

I would be happy to identify this journey into faith: it is a catechumenate, by which people journey towards and through their Baptism, or a repentance, by which people prepare for the sacrament of forgiveness, or an offertory procession, whereby people prepare the gifts for the Eucharist, or as a courtship, by which people prepare for marriage, or a sickness, which will end not in death but in the glory of God.

Now, the raw material for these experiences is not strange to us. It is the very fabric of our lives: St Paul would have said, *it is your flesh*. Some people translate that term as *human nature*. Now, the classical tag for the sacramental reality is that *Grace Builds On Nature*. Unless our religion takes hold of our flesh and blood, the actual reality of our lives, it remains notional, a pattern of the mind. Once it grabs the real me, the incarnation starts happening in us, and the Word is made flesh. This is the experience of power that is written so clearly in the Gospels.

Now, it would be easy, if a bit boring, for this power of Jesus to take us over and for us to lie back and let it happen. But that is not the way it works. The miracles do not calm people down and lull them to sleep. They are much more bracing than that: they get you on your feet and establish you in the sacramental field of power, so that you are yourself swept up into the process: Baptism makes you a member of the Body of Christ, with oxygenated blood to receive and translate into deeds, with messages from the Central Nervous System to respond to. How would you become a member of a body, and not find yourself functioning in a new, transcendent way which involves all the other members? You have things to discover: are you a muscular member, moving the bones gently but firmly into the posture they need to adopt: or a load-bearing bone, whose shape is perfectly adapted to the form of the whole Body; are you a brain-cell, forming thought, or a transmitter of feeling from one part to another? Maybe you are a toenail, with the task of reinforcing and protecting, and a duty not to become ingrowing: or a tooth, whose virtue lies in sharpness, and the well-used power to grind up food (and not bite the tongue). The one central condition for peaceful functioning in the body is to stay in touch with the

Head, and not begin to grow on your own account (a sometimes fatal condition known as cancer).

Thus, just as the blessedness of Jesus is not something to contemplate from afar, but something to aspire to, and as the kindness of Jesus invites us to believe in his love for us, the act of faith in Christ's power urges us to enter its field - not just passively, like the paralysed man who was lowered through the hole in the roof to get to him, but actively: put simply, the disciple becomes an apostle – one who is taught becomes a herald of the teaching. Thus there is in the relationship with Christ a genuine transition, out of the doomed world into the saved one, out of the orphaned world into the world where everyone is a child of God and a citizen of the Kingdom. This transition entails a whole change of view, a renewed mind, a transformed awareness of reality. The location remains the same: but the construction we place on it by our living is changed. We are building on nature the world of grace, the world that is sacramental: like us, it has become a place of blessing, and not just passively.

This reality can be experienced with prophetic insight, and the poet Yeats has captured such a moment in his poem