

# Encouragement

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*Challenging Faith...*

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There are many routes to Heaven. We must each find a way that enables us to reach our full beauty and potential. We must be guided by the Gospel, respond to our fellow human beings and listen to God's voice. This certainly is a time when we reflect on vocation and calling. Is it to be a 'contemplative' or 'active' (though these are not mutually exclusive), to Marry, be Single, Religious, or Priest? All these questions have to be sought and answered. However, what about our Faith? Those who are born into a faith, so to speak, are to an extent privileged but nevertheless have to keep building up strength to believe. We are also called to bring others to the knowledge of our Faith, but of course Faith is in itself a gift.

Today Evangelisation and Evangelism are neither easy or popular options when considering actions to bring people either back to the church or to a Faith. Yet we are called by Baptism and at every Mass sent out to live the Gospel and proclaim the Good News.

In recent years it has been harder and harder to do this as the world grows more secular and any belief system is either decried, denounced or ridiculed. At very, very least people seem to be apathetic. A hard task indeed, therefore for any Evangelist. There is also a reluctance too, to step out and witness (even without words!) because of the possible sanctions that are imposed by 'political correctness' or a judgment that all faiths are wrong or that they are all the same.

There are of course witnesses – people who live out their faith in areas of persecution. There are almost too many to count in say the Middle East, India, Pakistan – their lives are a challenge to us as they not only live but demonstrate their Faith. So the question arises – how do we take our Christian Faith outwards and give others the opportunity to get to know Jesus, or bring others back to Him? Clearly one vital way is through *prayer*. There is no Marian Apparition in recent times that this 'action' has not been encouraged as a road to personal conversion and that of others. It is a recurring theme in many situations.

Yet we still shy away from prayer that could bring about a change in attitude.

The commandments of love of God and love of Neighbour, as well as 'loving others as well as we love ourselves' would require us to bring others to the place where they can encounter Jesus Christ. This loving prayer

can do this in a mighty way. When we pray in this manner God answers our prayer in a splendid way. Today we have grown cynical about God's intervention in a direct fashion. We treat all apparitions and so called 'mystical events' with a degree of caution and derisively. We almost doubt miracles and that God can act, as and when He chooses. We have moved away from faith to a 'proof only' scenario and with this have lost the ability to believe that God can, and does, 'move mountains' and that He is capable of bringing anyone to faith directly if He so wishes for His own purpose. Saint Paul is a classic example of this. An attacker of 'Christians' or Followers of the Way, deeply promoting Judaic Law- he is then thrown off his horse and having encountered Jesus finds there is no turning back to former ways. What do we do with such a statement? We confine it to 'well, that was then, but it is different now'.

But how wrong can we be....? Against all odds and at great risk people are being called to know Jesus in a direct way. Sometimes it is by contact with 'the Word' – the Bible, sometimes through missionaries or other Christians, and yes, sometimes by *direct encounter with Jesus Himself*. This sounds improbable to many ears today. We are taught to shy away from such personal revelation and distrust the mystery of God's communication with man. We thus limit His authority and mastery of all things and also live in contradiction, accepting, if only just, the Pauline story or the Annunciation, in spite of a thousand such instances or encounters.

Yet God in His mercy does go and find the lost, the hopeless, the broken and reveals Himself to such as these. A book that should encourage us greatly, 'Dreams and Visions' (Is Jesus awakening the Muslim world?) by Tom Doyle brings us to a realisation that God's ways are not ours – He intervenes in the most unlikely places to unlikely people. Yes, we are not bound to accept these God instances but are we prepared to discount half the Bible, which is full of them?

Let us examine two instances of many others, quoted in this book of people who found faith through direct revelation of Jesus, unlikely as it may sound, to our Muslim brothers and sisters through dreams and visions.



However doubtful you may think this is, surely the fact that in proclaiming their Faith and accepting Christianity, they risk death and experience it, should make us ponder. These dreams and visions must have a life-changing force to make people choose Martyrdom. It is one thing to follow a 'dream' of any kind but quite another to be prepared to die for it.

God who gifts us with faith is doing amazing things for His people. Literally thousands of Muslim people of any group are being brought to Faith by a direct call. Nearly all receive some kind of revelation, usually a vision of Jesus, and a call to follow Him. So deep is the impression made on them that they seek out others, or are led to them, to get more information. All this happens against a backdrop of people being set apart from each other. We are all brothers and sisters of One God (and children of Abraham, Muslims, Jews and Christians). The movement of the Spirit is changing peoples' lives. Let us take a couple of examples – there is Amina, an unmarried young woman of 22 from the West Bank. Receiving dreams of Jesus nightly she finally summoned up courage to 'talk to' the prophet, as she knew him to be as a Muslim. She was shown 'a building' in her next dream- she went searching – she found it and a young man called Jamal: he had been told to find her. "Can I help you with something?" he said. He did not frighten her, she felt safe. He told her that he too had had a dream that had changed his life. He instructed her. Unable to openly read or watch television she hid 'the book' he gave her: even to mention Jesus' name would bring death. "Jamal had been clear about what being a disciple of Jesus would require of her, but it was tougher than she expected. Naturally gregarious, she chafed at having no-one to talk to about this growing relationship with her Saviour. But months later Amina lead her sister to Christ, and a chain reaction started. Soon there were five believers in Amina's ancient village."

Then there was Mohammed, a warden of a notorious jail, imprisoning and torturing many Christians, who again, astonishingly, changed his ways and was introduced to Faith by another Muslim convert who befriended him and forgave him.

"People long to see someone living this way for Jesus. The number one reason Muslims come to

Faith in Christ is because of love. In surveys of Muslim-background believers, the love they see between believers, and the love offered to them, top the list of reasons they became Jesus' followers."

God continues to reveal Himself and gather His children. Why are we so surprised that He uses many methods of doing so? Surely it should be a great encouragement to us, not only because He makes Himself known and visible, but that in so doing, continues to reveal Himself to us too.

Calling out to Him, He hears our cry. Our challenge is to believe that with Him we can do many things. Without Him we can do nothing. By love He conquers, not by violence. Are we ready to call all mankind our brothers and sisters, and reach out to them, singing alleluia for those who already have given their all and died for that Truth?

Halina Holman

#### **Pope Francis and Pentecost**

Dear brothers and sisters, we need to let ourselves be bathed in the light of the Holy Spirit so that he may lead us into the Truth of God, who is the one Lord of our life...Let us ask ourselves whether we really have taken some steps to know Christ and the truth of faith better by reading and meditating on Sacred Scripture, by studying the *Catechism* and by receiving the sacraments regularly. However, let us ask ourselves at the same time what steps we are taking to ensure that faith governs the whole of our existence. We are not Christian "part-time", only at certain moments, in certain circumstances, in certain decisions; no one can be Christian in this way, we are Christian all the time! Totally! May Christ's truth, which the Holy Spirit teaches us and gives to us, always and totally affect our daily life. Let us call on him more often so that he may guide us on the path of disciples of Christ. Let us call on him every day. I am making this suggestion to you: let us invoke the Holy Spirit every day, in this way the Holy Spirit will bring us close to Jesus Christ.

May 2013, Rome

*'Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts  
Of your faithful, kindle them  
with the fire of Your love:  
Send forth your Spirit and they  
shall be created and you shall  
renew the face of the earth'*



#### **Feast Days in May**

3<sup>rd</sup> SS. Philip and James, 4<sup>th</sup> English Martyrs,  
13<sup>th</sup> Our Lady of Fatima, 14<sup>th</sup> St. Matthias,  
25<sup>th</sup> St. Bede, 26<sup>th</sup> St. Philip Neri  
27<sup>th</sup> St. Augustine, 31<sup>st</sup> The Visitation.

#### **Major Feasts**

8<sup>th</sup> Ascension                      15<sup>th</sup> Pentecost,  
22<sup>nd</sup> Trinity Sunday              29<sup>th</sup> Corpus Christi,

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