

The New Reality Gospel

My concern is the centrality of Christ. I don't know about you, but my faith remains vibrant only when in a meaningful relationship with the Lord. Scripture tells me that by having Jesus in my life I have entered into a New Reality. That is exciting. However, what does it really mean? In explaining it I will keep it simple and effective. Much of Christianity can be confusing. With the Lord, what matters most, is not difficult to understand.

The concept of believers entering a New Reality is central to how the Christian faith functions. It is a very old idea introduced by Apostle Paul in explaining that a Christian is a new creation in Christ. The old has gone and the new has come. A divine reality with enormous positive potential has made home in my spirit. Years ago, theologian Paul Tillich declared that the Gospel message of a New Reality will be the only one capable of being truly relevant to the difficulties of a modern world. A world that tends to isolate people and dehumanise them while they are estranged from God. From a God who is total love, knows by name and not by number.

Above all, what matters in being a Christian is a willingness to firmly believe. If that seems obvious, the reality is that a deep conviction of Gospel truths is less common than thought. Christians may prefer to keep their faith superficial with an insufficient grounding of the divine activity within their soul. The mysteries of God are deep, but the Gospel is uncomplicated and the key points of the narrative are few. It is those points that deserve to be understood and believed in without reserve. On such, an unshakable faith may be built that is insightful and effective towards wellbeing.

Let's consider those points briefly. The insight that colours all knowledge of God is the fact that God IS love. God does not do love as a benevolent act, or is loving. God IS love. All that issues from God is grounded in the divine nature of love, in which it finds existence. The depths of this love are indescribable but the characteristics are not for you and I basically have an idea what it means to love. After all, we have been created in the image of God. God's love is wonderful, ever embracing and positive, and no negativity will ever be found in it. I have no real idea of how much I am being divinely loved, but I am, as are you. Unless God is thus understood by faith, God is misunderstood whatever the situation. The New Reality within me is an expression of divine love. Anything about God that implies destructive emotions cannot be right. Love covers all, Apostle Paul wrote; takes it on the chin without retribution. Consider anger, for instance, that

grinding feeling. Hundreds of years ago, in one of her visions, mystic Lady Julian of Norwich saw clearly that there is no anger in God. Better words are available in expressing divine concern. God can be displeased or indignant, surely disappointed many a time. Always, the Lord invites into his presence as a helper who understands and is kind, unsurprised by our problems and deficiencies. He offers the comforts of his love. I firmly believe this to be so.

Another point of fundamental importance in understanding the Gospel is the reality of sin; what is it and how come. The creation story in Genesis about Adam and Eve marvellously depicts the human predicament but that sin arrived literally because two people ate of an apple is a stretch too far. The story recognises the human plight and promises that one day the power of sin will be undone completely. Adam and Eve's failure highlights human moral capacity, an ability so unlike anything else that lives. It is this capacity that would become the pivot upon which the deliverance from sin would become possible: through a human person who would not spiritually succumb to temptation but in the power of utter suffering love disempower sin completely. Another deep mystery of God.

So, what about sin though? I hold that sin entered the fabric of creation from its very beginning. Why God allowed it, we will not know. I believe, that before anything was created in the Son, the implications of sin would have been clear to the divine Trinity, with the Son one day having to redeem a creation that was to be, and still is, held together in him. God's creative acts are an expression of love. But from the beginning this creative love had a monkey called sin on its back. Within creation it is the power of love that ensures life and brings the good. The power of sin brings disintegration and death. I was born with both the power of love and sin ingrained into every aspect of my being. My humanity is flawed. God will not hold me to account regarding that. What I will have to owe up to are the choices I freely make towards destructive behaviour, which in its ultimate expression is called evil. All my good deeds will find the appreciation of God, as will those of everyone else. The New Reality of Christ that dwells within me urges and assists towards all that is positive.

Next, let's consider the death and resurrection of Christ. Without it being true, Christianity becomes pointless, Apostle Paul wrote. The New Reality we are talking about would then be an illusion. But it is not. The divine act of defeating sin began with the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. The Son of God became personified as a human being. People are near enough to what God is like for the Son to be able to fulfil the divine plan towards redemption. The key to it, as mentioned with regard to Adam and Eve, is human moral capacity: freely making choices between good and evil. While on earth Jesus tried to make people aware of the presence and

nature of God, whom he called his Father. The divine purpose of his coming though was the cross on which sin would become disempowered for ever by love embracing all that sin could throw at it. Physically, Jesus was exposed to the power of sin like any other person. He would have died naturally if it wasn't for the cross. It was the spiritual side of his personhood that would face off against sin which, like love, has no substance. On the cross, in his suffering, Jesus was sorely tested in abandoning the fight that his Father and he had agreed on before the beginning of creation. For him, being the personification of God's love, the extreme task was not to succumb to the power of sin and make the choice of, 'I am finished', rather than being able to say, 'It is finished', as at the end he did. The power of love prevailed. It drank the cup of sin forever empty and nullified its power into zilch. The Christ prevailed, rose from the dead, and as planned God ushered in the next phase of creation: a New Reality, again existing in the Son.

So, what about this New Reality, that is everlasting and exists solely in the power of love? What might it mean for you and for me? The measure of its realisation within my soul rests on firmly believing in what has thus far been discussed. I must learn to engage with the Lord accordingly, which has little to do with religion. Religion is based on matters that are important but not primary. God is relational and not religious. The mystery of God, as explained by Apostle Paul, is Christ in us the hope of glory. Christians are looking forward to a heavenly glory that already now has begun to dwell within them as a New Reality. It is the Lord in me that makes living a truly Christian life possible. Church is of help, but may disappoint, with many a Christian no longer attending. Church or no church, Jesus never disassociates from a believer. The nature of his love makes that impossible. The potential of a vibrant faith remains for anyone who desires to have a relationship with the Lord. Church attendance though has its benefits.

The final question then is how to achieve and maintain a significant relationship with the Lord. Much has been written about it over the centuries but, once again, the crux of it is simple. Jesus says, 'Come!' Always God invites and never orders; never demands submission. The Lord will not restrict the free will of a person as it is central to what love is about. When I respond to the invitation the come with heartfelt willingness, something divine happens: I will sense that the Lord is present to me. My faith will open the door to a sense of his grace. A faith that I must maintain throughout my life.

'Come to me,' the Lord says, 'all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light' (Matthew 11:28-30).

The word yoke needs a little explanation. Jesus' audience, the people of Israel, were misguided and suppressed by their religious authorities. Jesus often riled against it. He told his listeners that his yoke would be completely different. In a Christian context the word yoke may be replaced with the word guidance and the word burden with task.

There is much more to be said about understanding God, religion and becoming intimate with Jesus. In a fragile world the Lord encourages believers to come in close, and those who are, closer still. Whatever excites in the Christian faith, being near to God should come first. Keeping the faith simple and effective is a must while living in a modern culture with its great knowledge and diverse opinions. My three short books called *Walking with God*, *Being with God* and *A Feel for God* may be of help. They are available for free as ebooks agapedeum.com.