

MONDAY OF EASTER WEEK 2

St John presents us in his Gospel with a number of examples of how people come to faith in Jesus. There are those who believe in him immediately, like his mother, at Cana, or the official at nearby Capernaum, whose son Jesus healed. There are those who never accept him, like those who come to arrest him in the garden. “Whom are you looking for?” asks Jesus. “Jesus of Nazareth.” They reply. Jesus answers with his Divine Name, “I am he”, the name God revealed to Moses, and they are knocked to the ground, yet when they stand up and he asks again whom they are looking for, they give the same reply: “Jesus of Nazareth.” His earthly name. There is no movement, no willingness to learn in them. But there are also those – the majority, in fact – who come to faith gradually. Remember the Samaritan woman, who moves from calling him “a Jew” to addressing him as “Sir”, then “a prophet”, and finally “the saviour of the world.”

But perhaps the most extreme example of these who come to faith gradually is Nicodemus, who first comes to Jesus secretly by night. Jesus begins a dialogue with him, as we just read in today’s Gospel, about the necessity of being born again. At first it might seem that Nicodemus is among those sceptics who cannot be convinced. “How can a man be reborn? Can he re-enter his mother’s womb?” he asks rhetorically, perhaps with a touch of mockery. Nicodemus slips away, leaving Jesus with a monologue, in fact. But Nicodemus is at base a good man. We will meet him again in Chapter 7, when he challenges the Sanhedrin, “Does our law judge a man without giving him a hearing?”, and finally, not at the eleventh but really at the thirteenth hour, he joins Joseph of Arimathea and that select group of disciples on Golgotha, when most have run away, bringing an enormous quantity of myrrh and aloes with which to bury Jesus as if he were a king.

Nicodemus could stand for many of our friends, or even family. One who has heard the message of Jesus, yet who seems to slip away, uninterested. Not a bad man, indeed one who has the courage to stand up for what is right, but appearing as a disciple only at the very end. We may think of real-life examples of such people: Bea Miles, the famous Sydney eccentric hijacker of taxi cabs, who became a Catholic in the last weeks of her life, or Bill Hayden, former Governor-General and notorious atheist, baptised just a couple of years ago in his old age. We must never give up on those who seem to have lost interest in the faith, especially when they are close to us. Give good example, pray for them, and trust that God’s grace and providence are at work. Yes, the wind bloweth where it listeth, as Jesus says. The Spirit is surely working things beyond our control, beyond our imagining.

Martin Wallace OP
Monday, 20 April, 2020