



PETER'S PEN

I grew up in a large family. There were seven of us in addition to our parents, so we needed a Combie van to get us all around and at times it all seemed a bit of a quash even then. Going on long journeys inevitably led to cries of ‘..are we there yet..’ from the back seats. Well, during Lent we are on a journey of sorts, the journey to Easter Day, and many of us have chosen some form of discipline to carry through this time – whether it be going for a quiet walk once a day, or even once a week. Some of us are gathering each week to reflect on the scriptures together and hold that in a long silence, others are meeting to prepare for the Dawn Service on Easter Day. Keeping a discipline can take some energy and commitment but I encourage you to persevere for maybe it will become a new habit, a new routine that bears fruit in your life.

This period of preparation before Easter has ancient origins and began as a time to instruct candidates for Baptism which was held either on Easter Day. This time of preparation was very intentional and at times demanding, as people gathered at the church **every morning** before the day began (before sunrise) to join in a communal act of morning prayer. That was followed by a time of instruction, whereby candidates learnt the stories of the Bible and the sweep of God’s history of redemption in our world. Over the course of their journey to Easter Baptism they were given some of the ‘treasures’ of the church – the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed - which they had to memorize by heart.

Today’s Gospel reading played an important part of that instruction, for it tells of a man wanting to learn more about Jesus – a man searching for the truth. The powerful thing about this story is that its about a man who was already a significant leader in the Jewish Community. He was a man who had carefully studied the Scriptures and the Jewish Law, but when he heard about Jesus he intuitively realised how little he actually knew. In Jesus something deeper was being offered to him, and he wanted to know more. It highlights the fact that whatever our age or station in life there will always be more to know of God, and to love in God. We are never too old or over-qualified where God is concerned.

We know that man’s name – he was Nicodemus. And he came to see Jesus and talk with him in secret. John’s Gospel says that he came under the cover of darkness! That’s a very poetic way of saying that he came at night-time, but John’s Gospel doesn’t use words lightly and without meaning. John wants us to know that Nicodemus was drawn to the light he saw in Jesus, that light which ‘*enlightens everyone*’. But he didn’t seem to want his colleagues to know what he was about. Did he want to be a ‘secret Christian’ not nailing his colours to the mast? That would be understandable, but Jesus calls forth in us something more, and as we trace the story of Nicodemus throughout the Gospel we see him – over time – becoming more public about the trust he placed in Jesus, standing up for him in the ruling council and finally at the end of the Gospel helping Joseph of Arimathea to take Jesus from the cross and lay him in a tomb. His growth to deeper faith grew over time, just as a seed planted in the ground takes time to germinate and sprout.

May this time of preparation before Easter be like that for you.

Peter