



Holy Week is a
time when most
Christians renew

their relationships
with God. But,
as one priest
suggests, it
should also be a
time to examine
whether one is
truly living out
one's religious
beliefs or merely
'doing time'
in church.

where you
**FIND THE
FAITH**

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By RICHARD T. NOLAN

A few years ago, when I met a man who rather quickly identified himself as a Christian, I cringed. When he said "Christian," several thoughts went through my mind — bigot, arrogant, mindless, intolerant, rigid, mean-spirited, and how can I get out of this conversation quickly!

Surprisingly, we had a brief but enjoyable chat. Subsequently, I was very aware of my initial reaction to his self-classification as a Christian, and I gave some thought to the many types of individuals and groups categorizing

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themselves as Christian.

Think for a moment. The medieval Crusaders who terrorized Jerusalem during their so-called holy wars were Christians. Slave owners included Christians. Nazis were (and are) Christians. Ku Klux Klan members are often "devoted" Christians. Some crime families are made up of Christians (who seem to have grand church weddings and funerals).

Some cultlike congregations are Christian. Extremist, anti-abortion terrorists include Christians. Corrupt TV ministers and sexually abusive clergy are Christians. Much of the bombing of buildings carried on in Ireland, England, Bosnia and elsewhere are by Christians. Christians continue to distort findings from scientists, including fellow Christians Copernicus, Darwin,

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CHRISTIANS

From 1F

Galileo and their successors.

Hate groups and youth gangs include large Christian memberships. Some militant, uninformed and cold-hearted men and women are smug, Bible-quoting Christians (eagerly courted by extremist public figures).

Ironically, many anti-Jewish individuals and associations that would exclude Jesus himself identify themselves as Christian.

Some Christians live within a religious delusional system with invisible chums, including a genie-like God, at their beck and call. I suspect that Plato would agree that many Christians exist in pitiful caves!

A youth asked Plato's teacher Socrates for the way to enlightenment.

"How badly do you want to be enlightened?" Socrates asked. "More than anything in the world" was the reply. Socrates took the youngster to a lake into which they waded neck-high. Then Socrates pushed the juvenile's head under the water. The youngster struggled desperately but Socrates kept pushing until the youth was on the verge of drowning.

When they returned to the shore, Socrates asked: "When you were under the water, what did you want more than anything else in the world?"

"Air!" was the firm response.

Socrates explained, "When you want to be enlightened as much as you wanted air, then you will be shown the way."

No compelling sense of need

How many modern Christians have wanted the Light of Christ more than anything else in the world, yes, as much as the air we require to breathe? With no compelling sense of need, most of us underwent nebulous baptisms and confirmations, unaware of the sacraments' implications for our personal identity and daily living.

With little or no understanding or commitment, the general public as well as many on the rolls of our British and American congregations, perceive Christ's Church, sacraments and pastoral care as public resources that everyone has an inalienable right to hire now and then.

When clergy acquiesce (as I have, and as I suspect most of us have), we breach the discipline we vow at our ordinations; we promote an inclusivity already gone awry; and then we all wonder why so little dedication is evident in the religion we sell almost for the asking.

We have not made it clear that the church is not just another entitlement program. Furthermore, many of us — ordained and lay — stagnate, oblivious to our continuing need for illumination in the Light of Christ.

Some Christians prefer to live entombed while staring at the walls of their candlelit mausoleums. They believe, self-righteously and mistakenly, that they are already fully enlightened

and genuinely alive.

Regrettably, the label *Christian* does not convey much about anyone's vitality or comprehension of the faith.

Some Christians live within a religious delusional system with a genie-like God at their beck and call.

Yet, should any Christians claim to be completely unshackled from their tombs? Does any of us possess a perfect vision of God's Light?

In the spirit of the Lenten season, let us explore how deeply we live within our own recesses by meditating on some soul-searching questions: Do I measure my beliefs in the light of Scripture, tradition, reason and ongoing corporate experience, or am I addicted to my own private — perhaps

underdeveloped — convictions?

Is my faith life-giving or is it stultifying? When new secular wisdom illuminates the human journey, do I grow in Christ's love and service, or am I paralyzed by my simplistic certainties? Is my

faith down to earth like Christ's or does it resemble a Disney fantasyland?

As much as I am enabled, do I live out my baptism with integrity or do I bend with the wind? Does my faith involve personal initiatives and responsibilities, or do I expect God to do it all?

Is prayer a refuge for inaction?

Does worship invigorate my life, or do I misuse prayer as a refuge for inaction? Do I have an appropriate commitment to the church as the household of a faith or is the church simply to *use* now and then as a public utility, perhaps with a token gratuity extended?

Does my faith celebrate responsible human diversity or do I censure most everyone different from myself? Is my trust in God unconditional, or does my faith depend on things going well for me? With true repentance, do I trust in God's mercy and absolution, or does my faith promote excessive guilt in which I wallow?

Do I worship only the Sovereign Lord God of Creation, or do I idolize pious customs, the bare words of the Bible or of the prayer book?

Does my faith express an Easter joy that heals inevitable sorrows, or do I endlessly indulge in petulant dejection? Are my heart and mind open to the beckoning Light at the end of the tunnel, the nudging of the Holy Spirit, the evolution of human insight and fellowship, or do I merely gaze upon the shadows of my own crypt?

Shortsighted, confining faith

It is sad that many Christians barely detect the radiant Light of Christ. With shortsighted and confining faith, too many of us remain shackled and entombed in a deathlike, spiritual slumber within our own cramped caves.

However, just as Lazarus was raised from lifelessness, all of us can be delivered from desolation and diminished realities.

My fellow pilgrims, listen again to Christ's appeal to Lazarus and to us to come out of our many tombs and *live* in increasing Light!

If we but choose to respond to God's life-giving grace, you and I can awaken further to embrace the challenging, animating Gospel of Christ —

where true reality and joys are found. The graceful nurturing of our hearts and minds in this vibrant faith is God's ongoing gift to us.