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Dear Friends

'I feel I've lost my faith.. everything seems to be getting darker'. 'All the things I used to believe in seem to have disappeared, evaporated'. These are just two examples of conversations I have had with people in the past few weeks. They have been quite brief and usually take place during my daily walks. Honest, open, sad and confused, I think these conversations are taking place among many in different places. We are hearing more and more often of an epidemic of mental health. This surprises none of us, because it comes close to home. All of us have struggled in the past year. It will take time before the full effects of this epidemic become clear. Every part of our lives are affected, but I wanted to focus in this letter on the question of faith. Our faith.

Not surprisingly, the pandemic has laid bare all the 'working parts' of our lives; who we are, what we are and how we relate to people and things around us. In other words, the fundamental building blocks of our lives have been put under the spotlight. We are now able to see, in a way that was not possible before, where we have invested our time, energies, hopes and yes, faith. When investments fail and disappear, bitter disappointment awaits. We can spend a long time kicking around in the ashes, wondering how we could have been so foolish, so easily hoodwinked, so mistaken.

But what happens when we realise that faith is slipping away, evaporating? Previous faith habits, ways of seeing things, a sense of belonging, all seem to be fading away? Some find this a liberating moment, freed from habits of a lifetime, to find a new perspective, a new approach. Others struggle with guilt and anger, blaming themselves and others. Others ask 'what now?'

You might expect me to say at this point that this is all regrettable and sad. On one level it is. When the ground under our feet, at one time so solid, seems to have given way, we are left confused and struggling. But on the other hand, I am convinced that this is one of the greatest moments in our faith journey that any of us will experience. Here is an opportunity that involves both pain and the promise of a fresh, liberating joy.

So, let us begin by asking in what or in whom have we been investing in our faith life? It could simply be the force of habit that has carried us through all these years. It could be faith in the institution of the Church, or indeed particular priests or fellow believers. Once we see that our investment has not brought the yields we expected and that we have been left with very little, we reach what seems to be a point of no return. Is walking through the door and closing it firmly behind us the only option? I don't think so.

My own experience over this past year has surprised me in many ways. My own prejudices and assumptions have been laid bare and I have had to spend uncomfortable times reflecting on my own piles of ashes!



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Served by the Churches of Our Lady of Compassion and St. Jerome

Roman Catholic Archdiocesan Trustees In. Reg. Charity No: 232709



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There have been moments of darkness too as I have struggled to make sense of the 'where now?' question. So many things that I had invested in over past years now seemed brittle and sad. There have been moments when I have realised that I don't have all the answers, when at one time I presumed that I did!

Like many, I reached my own fork in the road when, having kicked around in the ashes for a while, I was presented with a choice. To rescue what I could from what now seemed to be no more than ash and rubble, or to choose to walk in the direction of a growing light, a growing realisation. This light leads us away from a pit of despair and disappointment, and gently invites us to realise that we are part of a greater whole, a bigger reality. That all our attempts to live a transactional faith; I do something for God, He does something for me, comes to nothing. Perhaps for the first time, our true identity as sons and daughters, created, cherished, loved by our Father God becomes a little clearer. We do not worship a tyrant, a dictator who keeps careful note of every bad word and action, to imagine greater punishments for us. We are loved in our worst moments as well as our best. We do not have to snatch God's attention to say; 'look at me, see how good I am!'

This might all sound familiar to us, but as I have discovered in this past year, there is a vast gulf between hearing and speaking these words and actually making them our own and believing them. So when we think we are losing our faith, maybe we are actually losing a distorted understanding of God and my relationship with Him, the seeds of which were sown long ago.

So where is the path of this pandemic leading each one of us? Have we struggled with faith, with personal darkness, with doubt? Have we felt guilt or anxiety? Have we asked 'where now?' If so, then we are receiving a gift, not misery. Faith is not as fragile as we might think. When it is broken open, it reveals new lights, new possibilities and the opportunity to let go of all that had become unhelpful.

God is at work in each one of us; deep within us. He will not let all His work go to waste. He has invested nothing less than His whole self in each one of us. So maybe it is time to let go of what worked for yesterday and look forward to something new, something fresh that speaks to our time and our experience. As we move forward, let us be wary of the temptation to settle back into what we think is 'normal', to seek the comfortable. How easy it would be to return to old prejudices, old stereotypes and old ways of seeing the world around us. God is not thrown off beam by the pandemic. He works through it for our good. He wants us to take the opportunities he offers. He wants us to find richness and depth in our Christian life. He wants us to be happy. All that is holding us back are those old ways of doing things, old and tired ideas. 'See, I make all things new'. These words from the Book of Revelation show us God's intention. New days lie ahead, born out of the hard days of the pandemic. Rich blessings lie ahead for us all!

A very happy and blessed Mother's Day to all our wonderful mothers!

May God bless you and your loved ones,

Father John



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