

## LIFE AND WELL-BEING CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

## Recollections of a journey

FR CHARLÒ  
CAMILLERI,  
O.CARM.Acts 2:14, 22-33; Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11;  
1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35

In *Recollection of a Journey* (1952), Ray Coryton Hutchinson, tells the story of the Kolbeck family, who in 1940, under the Russian occupation of Poland, were inhumanely taken together with hundreds of thousands to forced labour in Siberia. The novel opens with the words: "Here it is my darling. You asked me to put together an account of those uneasy days, and I have done it as well as I can."

It's a well known fact that there is a healing power in telling our stories, especially if these concern traumatic events in our lives. Storytelling is an important feature in Luke's gospel, whose opening verses resonate with those of Hutchinson's novel.

The Emmaus narrative is in itself the storytelling of people who at first believe they are journeying with a stranger. There's some 'ironic tension' in the narrative of Cleophas and his anonymous companion telling their story to the stranger, who in turn retells their

narrative which is first and foremost his own story! Finally the narration of the same events from different perspectives and experiences start making sense as part of a larger scenario. With eyes wide open, Cleophas and his companion return to the apostolic group in Jerusalem to recount their story, enlightening the traumatic events of the brutal passion and death of Jesus. There, they also become receptors of a retelling of the same story by the apostles and their companions.

In telling our stories we connect, we stop being isolated, we are empowered, we emerge from anonymity, oppression, manipulation and oblivion. There, values are transmitted. In sharing their experience of events through storytelling, anonymous strangers become companions, namely "those who share the same bread". Their eyes are opened in mutual recognition and new life is birthed.

Theories on the identity of Cleophas' companion, kept in anonymity by Luke, abound. Some even suggest it might be Mary, Cleophas's wife, who on Good Friday stood beneath the cross with the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple. Luke perhaps chose not to disclose the name and gender to help the reader identify with the unnamed disciple and become part of the narrative. Whatever the reason, Luke gives voice to the first-hand account of someone whose memory would have been erased from history were it not for the power of storytelling.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter retells the Christ event, sharing his story through the use of other prophetic narratives from Scriptures. The powerful "with the help of wicked men, put Jesus to death by nailing him to the cross", in a bid to banish him to oblivion together with the many who were executed and their body left to rot and whose remains were thrown to the beasts or dumped.

Storytelling can be harbinger of life and therefore of the future. Indeed, there's great power in telling stories and to keep them in writing for future memory. Populist politicians, tyrants and dictators, conspiracy theorists, and adherents to historical negationism know this. Hence, throughout history, people in power resolve to ridicule, humiliate and silence courageous peripheral voices who in conscience persist to witness to truth and justice through their narratives for the sake of building a better future. Narratives preserve memory and do justice to past and present generations whose very existence and memory are threatened and silenced through *damnatio memoriae* mechanisms.

As heirs of the Judeo-Christian heritage of remembrance and memorial, we should never tire to use the power of narratives to hand on values. In a post-truth society, where conspiracy theories, denialism and distortions of history abound, this is a charge entrusted by Jesus Christ, God's story among us, to us disciples, his story in human history.

## Surprised by joy

KLAUS  
VELLA  
BARDON

We are going through a phase of unknown duration where Catholics in Malta are abandoning the Church in increasing numbers. The transmission of what was once the overwhelmingly predominant Catholic faith of our forefathers seems to have stalled.

No doubt, the reasons for such a dramatic development are complex and varied.

As we grow into adulthood, we all have to make up our mind about our core beliefs. However, one cannot sit on the fence. Even indifference, claiming to be an agnostic, being unable to decide whether God exists, is still taking a stand. Yet despite this depressing scenario, faith shines through. Providentially, we hear about conversion stories of prominent people who, in their own unique manner, find and embrace the faith that

has been neglected and abandoned by so many.

It is a fact that despite the unique different life experiences of those who were challenged to discover the faith, the reading of G. K. Chesterton's writings had a crucial influence on many Catholic converts. Sadly, his writings were neglected for decades even by Catholic educational establishments.

The revival of interest in Chesterton is mainly due to people like the Canadian Fr Ian Boyd, the American Catholic convert Dale Ahlquist, the Norwegian Geir Hasnes and to the English centenarian Aidan Mackey. Mackey made it his life's mission to track down the voluminous writings, scattered journalism and obscure publications of Chesterton. Mackey firmly believes that Chesterton was one of the deepest and most lucid thinkers that England has ever produced.

The impact of Chesterton's writing is best expressed by C. S. Lewis, one of the most outstanding Christian apologists of the last century. In his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis writes: "In reading Chesterton... I did not

know what I was letting myself in for. A young man who wishes to remain a sound atheist cannot be too careful of his reading."

Another and more recent convert was the writer Joseph Pearce, who was a racist and intensely anti-Catholic. When referring to his conversion, Pearce writes: "Chesterton is the most singular and important influence in my conversion... thanks to Chesterton I was obviously led to cultivate an interest in religion that later resulted in my reading so many more books written by other people."

E. F. Schumacher, the legendary economist who wrote the landmark book *Small is Beautiful*, also acknowledged his debt to the inspiration of Chesterton's thought and the social philosophy of Distributism. In fact, both Pearce and Schumacher were captivated by Chesterton's promotion of Catholic social doctrine that upholds the belief that the family is the cornerstone of society and that the economy should as much as possible be grounded in widespread, small, family-run businesses. Such an economic model guarantees economic and political freedom.



Faith is nourished by rational and inspiring literature.  
PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

It is therefore refreshing to get to know the history of the spiritual journeys of so many outstanding people of greatly diverse backgrounds who owe their conversion to the writings of Chesterton.

Faith is a gift and a blessing that is not only strengthened by prayer, but also by the nourishment of rational and inspiring literature.

I hope that Chesterton's works will once again become embedded in our Church schools and that those at the forefront of evangelisation will seek out his insightful wisdom.

KLAUSVB@GMAIL.COM

## QUOTES &amp; NEWS

## Where to meet Jesus

Pope Francis, in his *Regina Coeli* address, last Sunday, spoke about meeting Jesus:

"Where do we seek the Risen One? In some special event, in some spectacular or amazing religious manifestation, solely at the emotional or sensational level? Or rather in the community, in the Church, accepting the challenge of staying there, even though it is not perfect? Despite all of its limitations and failures, which are our limitations and failings, our Mother Church is the Body of Christ. And it is there, in the Body of Christ, that, now and forever, the greatest signs of his love can be found impressed. Let us ask ourselves, however, if in the name of this love, in the name of Jesus's wounds, whether we are willing to open our arms to those who are wounded by life, excluding no one from God's mercy, but welcoming everyone – each person like a brother, like a sister, like God welcomes everyone."

## Humans at the centre

Archbishop Gabriele Caccia appealed to the UN Commission for Population and Development to promote a model of development that has the "human person at its centre".

"Many development policies continue to reflect a view of the human person either as an obstacle to development or as a means of production to be exploited according to principles of profit and efficiency maximisation. ...Respect for life from the moment of conception to natural death and the promotion of the integral human development of every man, woman, and child must always be at the core of development policies."

## 'A splatter film'

The International Association of Exorcists has criticised the film *The Pope's Exorcist*, just released in the US, saying: "A viewing of the film's trailer confirms, as if that were needed, not only its nature as a splatter film – a genuine subgenre of horror films – but also its unreliability on such a sensitive and relevant subject. As in other films, everything is exaggerated."

(Compiled by Fr Joe Borg)