

At Ivanhoe Parish 5:00pm Mass on Sunday 11 April the Celebrant, Fr John Cunningham asked a number of questions. Afterwards I wrote down my thoughts on some of the questions, which in themselves raise others. Here is an edited version of what I wrote.

Q2: Thomas the doubter. How does doubt affect our lives and Church?

As a young(ish) person, I am often questioned about my faith and religion in my workplace or amongst groups or friends. These questions are usually directed at me at times when we are given public holidays e.g. Good Friday, Boxing Day etc as it makes my colleagues reflect on why we have these days as holidays. Sometimes people simply ask to stir up a controversial conversation. Other times I am questioned about it if I mention religion in conversation or include going to Mass as part of my weekend activities.

My colleagues (most of whom do not attend mass, consider themselves “not practicing Christians”, or consider themselves atheists or agnostic) commonly ask questions such as:

How do you know there is a heaven or that there is a God?
What about all the paedophiles?
Catholics think they are the only ones that will be saved?

I usually answer as follows:

Heaven?

I don't care whether there is a heaven or a hell. That is not what my faith is about for me. I believe that we should do what is right and live in communion with each other because it is the only way our world can work and operate for the betterment of humanity. My faith is about how I should live today for today and on earth. Life is about others and not ourselves. We should not live according to Christ because we want to get to heaven but because we respect each other as humans sharing this world together. I don't care whether there is a heaven or not. Religion for me is about living in a community to encourage us to continue to do what is right for others. As Christians we are lucky to have Jesus as a model. A perfect model.

There is no scientific question as to whether an amazing man who did good to others, lived on this earth. He did. That is enough for me. Catholicism happens to be the religion I choose to nourish my faith in. God respects all religions and faiths. Ultimately, every faith has the same agenda, striving to be better people and serving others.

Paedophilia

There are people who are led the wrong way or do the wrong thing in every community, group, work place, school, family etc in one way or another. Paedophiles are found in places of power and leadership. They are amongst doctors, schools, religious groups and sadly even families. This is fact. But there are always more doctors, teachers, religious leaders and parents that are fulfilling their roles doing

exactly as they ought to, caring for and serving others. We do not stop having children, creating families and educating teachers because of the few bad amongst them. Nor should we brand the Catholic Church as evil because of the bad priests amongst the many good ones.

The chosen people

I usually respond to this, by telling the inquirer that this attitude is VERY old school and that if they participated in the Church today they would not find a priest that preaches this notion. I always tell them that my priest and most others I listen to when travelling (Byron Bay was the latest) preach that we are ALL God's people regardless of religion, colour, faith, sex etc and that everyone is welcome whether they are here for the first time or only attend once a year. I say that as God is forgiving there is no one I know who is going anywhere but to heaven if there is one. I again remind them that for me religion is about living the right way in this world now and not about the after life. Whatever happens afterwards will be a bonus.

A Canadian girl I befriended while living in Japan is a member of a new Christian Church in Canada. After 6 months of attending each other's mass services and discussing our faiths, she eventually said to me, "Catholics think they can do whatever they like because they can simply see a priest and confess their wrongs". Amongst other things I told her that this was not so. Catholics have a conscience just like other human beings. I questioned her about her belief and whether she believed her Church were the chosen people. She did believe this. I asked her if she really believes that her little Church of 5000 in Vancouver Canada are the only people that will be going to heaven. I asked if her neighbour, who does not go to her Church or any other, but helps the poor, welcomes everyone and is good to all people, is going to miss out if there is a heaven?

Our discussions went on further. I always come back to the point that it should not matter who is or who is not of any particular faith as faith and religion should be about living in communion with each other today.

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