



Pondering the secret things of God

Before anything of God will be revealed to us or through us a heart-felt and a heart-known dependence on the Lord is required of us, and especially knowing that without Him, without the Spirit, we can do nothing writes Mike Edson

Faith is the dance which goes beyond words

A world-famous ballerina excelled in her solo dance. An ecstatic reporter asked her 'Could you please explain why you danced like that?' She replied 'If I could explain it in words I would have had no need to dance it.'

In our word-centred culture that little story reminds us that meaning and truth are not necessarily captured by words. So too, faith, its meaning, can never be imprisoned by words and doctrines no matter how skilfully woven. Faith is the dance which goes beyond words and through it and by it we see something more of the glory of God.

And knowing the 'something more' means we have seen something of the mysterion of God; which is something more of His glory which had been hidden, something more of his purpose for us which was previously unknown, something more of his compassion for us not previously experienced. However to be clear this knowing is the difference between knowing how Michelangelo sculpted the boy David and being overwhelmingly awestruck when one sees it for the first time.

The Eastern Orthodox Church ponders much more about the mysterion

This is exactly how we embrace what Jesus has done for us in His death and resurrection. We may have been brought close to understanding by one of the teachings about the cross which show how it works, but it is when our hearts are opened, once we see and believe, once we are awestruck, have we encountered the mysterion. How does this revelation come about? Paul wrote that his message was not with wise and persuasive words but with the demonstration of the Spirit's power. The mysteria of the Lord are revealed when and only when the Holy Spirit joins our words, actions and rituals and fires them with His power.

The Eastern Orthodox Church has

always been more conscious of the work of the Holy Spirit compared with the rational, logical West. It ponders much more about 'mysterion'.

A good example is the story of the Transfiguration. On the mountain, three of Jesus' disciples encounter the mysterion, the 'secret' of Christ. Of course, they had been with Jesus for a couple of years by then, receiving his teachings, witnessing his healings and miracles, and even confessing who He is. But had they truly seen who He is? Words and actions are never sufficient.

So, somehow or other, the three, gazing at Him, see the glory of God shining through Him and they hear the voice. They catch a glimpse of who He is. The Spirit has opened their eyes and they try to captivate this mysterion by building tabernacles!

So, what 'mysteria' are revealed here? Naturally, who Jesus is. But there is more. God's glory shines through this human being, a man of our flesh and blood and so we catch a glimpse of God's purpose for all flesh, we shall be sharers in the glory of God. And if our eyes have been truly opened we will also see not only a promise of glory for human creatures but the whole creation.

'The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.' Romans 8:21.

Then there is our life together as the body of Christ brought into fellowship through baptism and nourished by the Lord's gift of bread and wine. Is there meant to be an encounter here with the reality of God through word, action conjoined to the Spirit? Can the faithful see afresh the grace, forgiveness and energizer of New Life radiating from the death and resurrection of Jesus offered to the believing recipient? If these two sacraments are also 'mysteria', we cannot reduce them with such words as transubstantiation at one extreme, nor merely a memorial service at the other. There is here something more than

sophisticated words of the prayer book or modern liturgies.

Our response? A holy, reverent silence, a filled space without words, receptive and attentive.

Humility means a heart-felt and a heart-known dependence on the Lord not as servile grovellers, but as servants called to do His work

This takes us back to Scripture, scripture which challenges us about our own mind-set. It is too easy in our managerial, scientific and analytical culture to find satisfaction and purpose in relying on our own organizational skills. We can so often delight in being expert in the latest church-growth techniques, and imitating the methods of the most recent 'successful' church. Of course, we have our part to play, disciplines to follow; chaos is not part of God's plan for his people. However, one crucial mind-set is required of us before anything of God will be revealed either to us or through us; humility. Humility means a heart-felt and a heart-known dependence on the Lord, not as servile grovellers, but as servants called to do His work, and especially knowing that without Him, without the Spirit, we can do nothing.

It is easy to write and read these words, but their reality has to sink into the deepest part of who I am before my Lord if we desire earnestly to be 'servants of Christ and those entrusted with the secret things of God.' 

about the writer

The Venerable Mike Edson was for 40 years involved and committed to renewal within the Anglican church through parish ministry, being warden of Lee Abbey, Devon, and Archdeacon of Leicester. He retired two years ago, but is still 'working and praying for the renewal of Christ's church and the conversion of England'. He is a Trustee of ReSource and is married to Frances.