Monastic Scribe 110 – October 16, 2026

I BELIEVE / I KNOW / I AM CERTAIN

Religion has been on a downward projection of late. People have been giving up on membership in faith communities. The sexual abuse crisis, which is again in the news here in Massachusetts, has been the impetus for many to give up on membership in a church. Some would say their faith has been shaken and they give up. I do wonder, though, have many given up on belief in God too? This is a much more complicated question and is difficult to answer. I think some people say they no longer believe in God but on a deep level want to believe and actually do believe but in a different way.

Apart from rejection of a communal institution, some give up on God because of their expectations of God being shattered. They have put their faith in God, said their prayers, lived a good life, and then are visited by some calamity – the death of a child, the news of a fatal disease, the images of Gaza, and many other events in life that shake us up.

The story of Job in the Hebrew scriptures describes a good and just man who is visited by one calamity after another – loss of children, livestock stolen, physical ailments increasing. Friends come to him and ask him what he must have done to deserve such punishments. Job responds that he has not done any such deeds. Finally, at the end of the book, God appears on the scene and grills Job on his place in the creation of the world. Were you there when the dawn appeared? God is God and Job is not. This is not a fully satisfying answer for us humans who seek and are curious. We want an answer to the bad things that happen to good people.

God's response, of course, is the direction to an answer. God is Ultimate Mystery and cannot be understood by mortal beings. The rest of scripture, including Jesus of Nazareth, does not give us a full answer either. Jesus calls God his "father" (Abba) which tell us that Ultimate Mystery is personal and relational. There is quite a bit to unpack in this revelation but not a complete answer.

Where does that lead us poor humans who, as children, believed in adults as god-like. Then we grew out of that. We believed in Santa Claus but let that go, though not without an enhanced fantasy and imaginative life. Is it unreasonable that I should question and doubt all this? Actually it is very reasonable. Doubt brings us

to faith and uncertainty, to darkness and mystery. Thomas Merton, great mystic of the twentieth century, once said that the person of faith who had never experienced doubt is not a person of faith.

The first challenge of our doubt is the need to examine our image and definition of God. Is it still a childish image of a protecting parent? Hopefully it is not, nor is it, as it is for some people, the image of a judge or policemen! We are made, as humans, to grow up spiritually as well as physically. Who is God for me? Who is Jesus for me? Who am I?

Our spiritual growth is not totally unlike our growth in mature love. Our faith, like our love affairs, goes through growing pains. Many of us go through stages of infatuation, honeymoon, passion, waning of fervor, growth in knowledge of oneself and one's beloved, periods of dry commitment. Mother Teresa revealed in her diaries that she was in darkness and emptiness as far as God's consolation was concerned. This did not leave her depressed nor despondent but living in faith. Saint John of the Cross, mystic of his and our time, says that coming to darkness about God is the beginning of real faith and closeness. He describes the night of the senses and the night of the spirit. A married couple may also find this in a loving relationship when one's partner succumbs to dementia or when he/she dies.

Faith is not the opposite of doubt and darkness. It is the opposite of certitude. God is beyond any image we have, whether a father, mother or any material representation. When we get beyond these and face the Ultimate Mystery of God, then we are living in faith. God dwells in us and, through faith, we know that presence. This is a faith beyond beliefs. It is a time to be regular in prayer, in silence. Our faith is being purified, becoming more real. It is also a time when our place in a community of faith helps to keep us going in a steady way. The church is a sharing with other seekers for that elusive God. Yes, there are many church goers who are unaware of all this, who are indifferent to their inner life and search, but there are those who are struggling too. We are, together, saints and sinners, seeking the face of the living God. We need time to be silent and alone. We also need time to have others in our life who share our quest for that which transcends us.

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I like this verse on love attributed to Michael Leach and found in Ronald Rolheiser's new book, "Insane for the Light". I apply it to faith. –

First comes falling in love, which is the easy part.
Then comes learning to love, which is the hard work.
And then there is living in love, which is the best part.

In one of the gospels, one hurting person cries out to Jesus, "I believe, Lord; help my unbelief". I hope some of this rings true in your life. If you want, you can let me know at: joycet@glastonburyabbey.org.

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.