

Johnny would not eat his prunes. His parents were very cross and eventually banished him to his bedroom with the comment that not only they were cross, but God was cross as well. Shortly after this domestic incident, a thunderstorm blew up and mother became anxious for her little boy, but father insisted he stay where he was and take his punishment. However, when the house next door was struck by lightning mother could stand it no longer and flew upstairs to her son's room. At first, she couldn't see him but finally spied him kneeling by the window looking out. She was just in time to hear him say calmly, how ridiculous, God, all this fuss over four prunes.'

What a contrast between the imagery of the vision that St. John records in our epistle and the simplicity of a natural event that Jesus addresses in the gospel of Luke. My first question is do I usually encounter the presence of God through mystical experiences of revelation or am I more aware of the divine in my ordinary engagement with the world? For me it is the later, for I can name only a few occasions in my Christian journey where I have been overwhelmed by a vision or an experience that I could call a supernatural event.

Overall, my encounter with God occurs in the ordinary events of life, where I recognise truth or become aware of divine activity.

This week I was in hospital with a suspected blood clot, and I felt a deep sense of peace, as I trusted in the professional care of the health workers. I experienced what I call the presence of God in their ministry towards me and as I spoke to other patients waiting to be treated, I endeavoured to share that peace by befriending those who appeared frightened or vulnerable.

I recognize there are mystics who do encounter visions of God, who have deep awareness of spiritual warfare, who become caught up in the awe and wonder of seeing into different dimensions of human experience. I also know that there are many people who create similar experiences using hallucinatory drugs or endure such insights through their state of broken mental health.

But I suspect that like me, you usually live in the world of ordinary life, where there is that blend of joy and pleasure, mixed with struggle and pain. This unique world where there is injustice, violence, war and horror afflicting some and for the rest of us the ordinariness of life with its routines, challenges, the blessings of health, family and friends. It is too easy to forget the presence of God when we experience the ordinary pursuits of life and then blame God or feel abandoned when the afflictions of life befall us. The simple story of Jesus in the boat means a lot to me. For when I faced my personal loss of my partner suddenly dying, I knew that Jesus was with me in the boat of my trauma but like this gospel story he seemed to me asleep.

I experienced the fear of the storm of anguish, the waves of emotions, and the fear that I would drown in the tears of my sorrow. In the story recalled by Luke, the disciples woke Jesus up. They shouted at him and no doubt shook him in his slumber. His response is to ask them where their faith was. In other words, he calls them to remember his promises, to recall all the other times when they have faced dangers with him and to know deep in their being that he'll never abandon them, however great the storm is.

In the pastoral care of the church, we meet people going through immense suffering and our role is to be with them, to accept their fear, confusion and anger and to remind them through our presence that they are not abandoned by either us or by God. Faith can be awakened when it has been allowed to sleep.

In the same way we act in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, who need practical support and acceptance. Those of you that work in the Fridge on a Friday know that by providing what you do and being there for those who use the service, you are providing the solidarity of faith and love.

As a nation we do the same when we stand with those who are being oppressed. Whether it be the people of Ukraine, the innocent people of Gaza, the Israeli families whose loved ones have failed to be returned alive from their capture.

Whether it be the people of Russia who risked arrest by visiting the grave of Alexei Navalny on the anniversary of his death or the Bishop of Washington who courageously addressed President Trump the day after his inauguration and called him to show mercy.

It is through our solidarity with such people that we declare that neither we or God are asleep and that the divine command echoes through the universe declaring that there is one greater than all who is truly in charge.

For the vision of John's revelation is that heaven is a reality, and the door is open for all to freely enter. Yes, it is a future inheritance but as Jesus revealed, he came to show us that our role is to establish the Kingdom of heaven on earth - thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. We are called to command the storms to cease.

We are called to speak to power, to name injustice. To proclaim that the teachings of Christ are not a flight of fancy but a reality that we must work to achieve. So, whether it be listening to another, standing in solidarity with someone, petitioning our elected leaders, praying for peace or working for justice, we are called to plant a little of heaven on earth.

And neither do we lose that eternal vision of heaven in all its fullness. For as we grow older or as our mortal days on this earth draw to their end, we need to cling to that hope that we shall walk through that door, and we shall experience the awe and wonder of that reality.

A reality which is contained in one truth: the worship of God as our source and destiny, as the one who has created us and seeks that our voice might join the company of praise for eternity. For in that place no wars, injustice, suffering or fear is present.

"Mummy, do all fairy tales begin: "Once upon a time"?"

No, darling, some of them begin: "When I became a Christian all my problems were over."