

GLIMPSE

Cloudy Skies

Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J.

When I was a younger Jesuit, during evening meals, which were endured in silence, a five-minute reading from the Martyrology began the meal. This book recalled the deaths, in some rather vivid description of the men and women of faith during the history of the faith. One believer in Rome was placed alive in a metal casket and then placed on a huge pile of burning logs to be boiled in his own juices. Heads were chopped off; limbs pulled from bodies, eyes plucked out and of course the hungry lions having their meal with the meaty Christians. Blood and bones all over the place while we who were supposed to be eating, poured catsup on our boiled liver.

It actually was a kind of martyrdom to eat the liver. We would sit there thinking about whether or not we could suffer that kind of death, because of our faith. It took faith to eat the liver, but to give up our young lives, that would take a lot of conversion. Believing in what we can kind of understand is not so easy. It is difficult for us to believe a lot of things which others tell us. We have so many verbal responses to what we are told. "Get out of here with that", "You're pulling my leg", "No way", "Are you kidding me", "Bologna", and there are other less polite terms to register uncertainty or impediments in the veracity of others. You can make your own list.

Here is something you might consider believing. God is more aware of how amazing it is that we believe in the Divine than we are. The more we become influenced by instant information and verification, the more technology secures us, the more lights we have and databases we can consult, well, the more difficult it is and will be to believe what we cannot touch, see, or hear. In my simple mind I can understand just how difficult it is to go beyond that security of knowing. God holds us less accountable in our acceptance of God, eternity, miracles, the Eucharist, Grace, even Jesus. Faith is a modern miracle, because of the other modern miracles.

Our experiences of faith are like our experiencing of clouds. No two clouds seem to be alike. No two experiences of faith are alike either. Sometimes we find believing easier than other times. Clouds are seen, but not grasped, but there is something there and sometimes the sky is actually clear, no clouds. Sometimes there seems to be no faith, no sense of something, someOne being up there, out there, in here. Faith is not an ego-flattering experience. Believing is the acceptance of a poverty-of-mind which is so hard for us moderns. It is more than a feeling, more than an idea and always there is the fear of being fooled, swindled, and made to look stupid. We do not wish to be seduced and be found naïve.

Faith is deeper than merely giving up, but rather it is the time-centered wrestling to cross the threshold of knowing and living as if we did. We just might be foolish though and that possibility gives each faith experience its cloud-like shape. Some clouds are fragile and some are quite powerful. Basically it does take this fragility, this doubting to make faith real. It is only a glimpse, so please pass the catsup.