



# Living by Faith Not Certainty

One of our friends wrote a note in her Christmas card to us saying that she was concerned that she was no longer as *certain* about her Christian beliefs as she had been in the past. I wanted to give a cheer of victory for two reasons.

First, she was most likely moving away from a long held but relatively unexamined and unchallenged set of beliefs, and into a new realm in which she did not have those ready answers to her belief questions. She had begun to question whether or not she still maintained bonafide Christian faith.

The reason this is good is because growing to a new level of faith always requires letting go of some sense of security and getting beyond having to have clear cut answers, learning to live gratefully within the boundless mystery of God.

The second reason her situation is promising is because she felt concerned about this new development in her life.

She did not merely dismiss everything in her past faith experience. Rather, she was only becoming open to a new and greater faith experience although her level of certainty was diminished.

From a spiritual point of view *certainty* is never a part of the picture. We never can succeed in defining the parameters of faith or in understanding the mysteries of God. The spiritual journey is a journey of *faith*, not of *certainty*. It is a process of growing in the recognition and acceptance of God's activity in the world and in our lives, the sending of Jesus being among the most obvious and celebrated.

However, when it comes to Jesus, many diverse and conflicting belief systems have been developed surrounding the who, why and what of Jesus. For two thousand years human efforts to understand and define the nature and ministry of Jesus have resulted in division, divisiveness, dissension, war, murder, hate and separation. Rather than simply accepting and celebrating the activities of God, including the sending of Jesus, and experiencing the love it is intended to bring, human nature has turned it all into a battle ground of conflicting ideas, notions and beliefs. The Church has been a willing accomplice in this tragedy with its insistence on believing that designated teachings must be held as true and *certain* for the sake of salvation.

Whenever the process becomes a matter of developing, defining and defending *right beliefs* versus a simple faith in God's love for us, then the essence of God's intent is lost to our arrogance. *Certainty* about religious/Christian beliefs has been nothing but destructive.

Back in 1670 John Locke wrote about having humility regarding his own cherished beliefs: "No matter how much certainty is in our hearts, human beings cannot know for

sure which *truths* are *true*, and believing that we can (know for sure) leads us down a terrible path.” The religious scene as well as the present political scene testifies to the truth of that statement.

St. Paul said it well: “Now I know only in part; then I will know fully”. (I Cor.13:12)

If you feel uncertain about particular belief issues, welcome to the world of faith. It is about the Holy Spirit who lives within each of us, instilling in us the wondrous gift of faith. It is a matter of living more intimately with God and becoming increasingly aware of that uplifting experience. It is not a *head trip*; it is a *journey of our spirits*.

