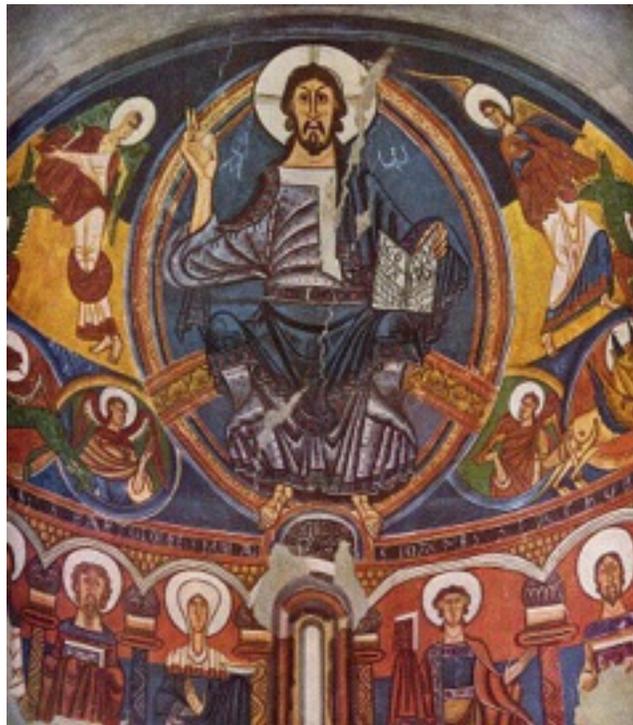


# We Must Undergo Many Hardships



By Fr Robin Gibbons

Fifth Sunday of Easter

*'They strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."' (Acts 14: 22)*

Hardship is no stranger to anybody engaged on the spiritual journey! For in dealing with the things of the spirit, we are often asked to confront the whole picture of ourselves as human beings-able to do good or to do evil, we are further called to recognise the journey of life not as some seamless whole that should ideally be like a Hollywood movie, but as one of many parts and fragments in which God walks alongside us

How we discern the activity of God amongst us depends a lot on who we are and what we are doing, but we can take heart and comfort from these words of the Book of Revelation: 'I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people\* and God himself will always be with them [as their God]"' (Rev 21:3) This is a reiteration of Christ's words, who promised to be with his people until the end of the ages (Mt 28:20), but it also a challenge to all of us to get out

there, stop moping about in the safety of our narrow faith boundaries, and see the world as God's own not ours. Religious people need to be reminded that God does not fit neatly into our own categories of experience, rather we have to fit into God!

It takes a brave person to stand up to some particular faith types who seem unprepared to acknowledge that their 'church' does not represent the complete Kingdom of God-but that is something we must tackle if ever we are to reach out across the world in Christ's name to proclaim the 'good news' to different cultures and peoples, and also beyond our human existence-to see and experience in creation God's Kingdom present and also coming!

Hardships are all part of that necessary task of growing through whatever life offers, to recognise that Eden's perfection has not yet returned-but that it is groaning into being and that may involve effort, destruction and renewal. John's vision on Patmos points this out to us: 'The one who sat on the throne\* said, "Behold, I make all things new."' (Rev 21:5) That is also what Holy Pascha, Easter means for us all, that the One risen from the dead is even now, in the Spirit, making all things new-but it comes through hardship not without it!

How we can help this 'new life' come about? First of all we challenge the narrow visions of those who lead us into gloom and doom: that is not the Paschal song! Secondly we open our hearts and minds to the abiding gift of God present now in a world that is blessed and which we must cherish, a new world which God so loves and all things in it!

Thirdly, we need to refrain from destructive and unthinking criticism of God's acts through others, just because you or I do not like something does not mean this is not God's work, and fourthly, we bear one another's burdens, try to ease the hardships of life, by living out the Beatitudes-remembering as Jean Vanier's great words remind us that, "The world is upside down, the Gospel is the world right side up."

In other words we live through this command of Jesus; 'I give you a new commandment: love one another.

As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.

This is how all will know that you are my disciples,

if you have love for one another.'" (Jn 13:34,35)

That my friends turns the world upside down!