

LIVING INTO THE MYSTERY OF GOD

1 Corinthians 15: 51 “I want to teach you this mystery.”

In 1st Corinthians chapter 15 nine questions are posed by the writer. These are:

1. If Christ is preached as risen from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?
2. What are these people doing who are baptized on behalf of the dead?
3. If the dead cannot be raised, why do they want to be baptized for the dead?
4. Why do we constantly risk our lives?
5. Was it for nothing more than human gain that I fought in Ephesus like a lion tamer?
6. How will the dead be raised?
7. With what kind of body will they come?
8. Death, where is your victory?
9. Death, where is your sting?

Six of these nine questions speak directly to the subject of death. The other three deal with real human experiences of taking risk, acting courageous, and, focusing on the nature of the body that transcends physical existence. Beyond these issues it seems the audience to who the Apostle Paul was writing were concerned, and some would even say, obsessed with issues concerning death. However, we feel about the questions posed in chapter 15 of 1st Corinthians, the point is there were Christians who were challenged by the prevailing views concerning the

resurrection. They were not happy with the prevailing views and were therefore using the Socratic approach to gather information that could help to enrich the life of faith.

It is into this context of a soul always restless for information, and the need for increased knowledge of God and about God, that we should place our brother Cedric. Cedric was not prepared to take things at face value. He had a number of questions about faith, God, the Church and the ultimate destiny of human beings. He valued the Socratic method of searching for answers through continuous questioning. It is pursuit of such questions that he felt people could arrive at answers to life's questions. He was therefore not prepared to simply rest with things as they are; rather, he was prepared to push the proverbial button of truth to uncover the essence of who we are as human beings and the ultimate meaning of our lives. It is in support of such questioning that I have focused this reflection around the theme: "Living into the mystery of God."

Living into the mystery of God seems to have been part of what the writer of the 1st letter to the Corinthians had in mind as these nine questions were contemplated. Living means embracing the truth of the Gospel which the writer

highlights in 15:1-2. Here the Gospel is described as good news because it saves people. It is very personal in nature so of necessity it must be transmitted from one person to another. St Paul is said to be the personal bearer of the good news to the Church in Corinth and generations of individuals have been bearing this message of good news since the first century.

This good news Paul preached is not just about living; it is also about the mystery or plan of God. In 15:51 Paul says “I want to teach you this mystery.” Mystery here means a plan with a specific purpose in mind. The purpose of this plan is the transformed status of those who are saved by the good news. You see, friends, in the society at the time, that is, first century Roman society, Christians were mostly found among the poor and marginalized. Day by day they would watch family and friends die in an atmosphere of indignity as their lives were not generally valued. Good news in this context means every person is loved and valued by God and God wants to live eternally with His people. Mystery is the word used to describe the divine plan to embrace all people as children of God. Children of God are destined to live with God forever.

Living into the mystery of God means ultimately spending quality time with God in this life, in anticipation of spending even more quality time in eternity. Those who raised the questions to which Paul was responding in this letter seem to have an overriding concern. If there is to be life with God beyond death then how can we be sure of this; what guarantee is there that we are assured a place in the eternity of God? In other words, for the people asking the questions, the real issue is, how do we make sense of death in a context in which we see our families dying without dignity? The real issue for them friends is how to make good sense of life in the midst of death.

Paul's response is that death has already been conquered by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, he suggests, death can only make sense if we understand it as a process whereby "our mortal and perishable being put[s] on the life that knows neither death nor decay" (15:53). It is on the basis of this premise of union with a life that knows no decay that we are to make sense of the victory which exists over death. "Death has been swallowed up by victory." This is the result of the death and resurrection of Jesus. "Death, where is your victory?" This is a means of ridiculing a means used by established society to humiliate the majority poor. Paul says to the Church in Corinth there is no need to feel

humiliated in death or in life. Neither death nor life can rob us of the dignity we already have thanks to the resurrected life with God in Jesus Christ. Living in the mystery of God is living the resurrected life in the present and the future.

Cedric Harold reflected long and hard on this life. He was mindful that not all his questions were answered, nevertheless, he was satisfied he pursued the questions with vigour and some satisfactory answers were provided. Following my recommendation he did a course in early Church history at the United Theological College of the West Indies a few years ago. He enjoyed the encounter and valued the interaction with students and lecturer alike. In the end, Cedric was able to resolve much of the conflicts of faith by living in the mystery of God. Though not all the questions were answered, he was able to rest secured in the fact that his mother's faith has at last been vindicated.

Today we celebrate the life of Cedric. He was a man with questions, but, he was bold enough to pursue answers to them by living in the mystery of God. He was mindful of the value of faith in God, especially as he saw the example in his mother. We praise and thank God for his life and trust that Hazel, Gwyneth, and other family members will be strong in their faith and keep the memory of

Cedric alive in their hearts. In the meanwhile this is our opportunity to grow in faith and live in the mystery of God. Cedric has left us the legacy of following our questions to their logical conclusion in the mystery of God. It is at the conclusion that we meet Christ as the answer to our questions and so celebrate victory over death and move into the life God has in store for all people. May his soul rest in peace, and, light perpetual shine on him.