

Dear Friends

We all love a mystery. And we enjoy following Sherlock Holmes or Lord Peter Wimsey, Falco, Cadfael, Miss Marple, or whoever else it may be, as they unravel it for us. But the greatest mystery of all is life itself. And that is so much harder to unravel. Is there a God out there? If there is, why did He create this world, teeming with so much life, and then give us the freedom to build or to destroy, to love or to hate, and to ask so many awkward questions? If there is a God, what does He think He's doing, and what, if anything, am I here for? Is there any purpose in my existence, or is death simply the last full stop on the final page of a book which ends without coming to any conclusion?

St Paul, whose conversion to Christianity we have just celebrated insists that the mystery has now been revealed. What mystery would he have had in mind? How can he be so sure that it has been laid bare? If the revelation to which he points was enough to answer the questions that were being asked in the first century, is it still relevant to the questions we ask in the twenty-first century? Can we draw strength from his assurance, and if so, how?

In modern usage a mystery ceases to be a mystery as soon as it can be satisfactorily explained. When we know 'whodunit' the mystery is over. In New Testament usage however, a mystery is a secret which has been, or is being revealed; but because it is a divine secret, it remains a mystery, a truth accessible only to those to whom understanding has been given.

For Paul, the first important aspect of this great mystery is the way Christ has opened salvation to Gentile believers on the same terms as to Jews. There had been hints of this in the Old Testament. Foreigners likewise – Gentiles as Paul would have called them – if they keep the law and hold fast to God's promises, their sacrifices will be accepted, and 'my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples' (Is 56.7). If the first aspect of the mystery now revealed in Christ is this rich fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, the second aspect is the way in which the divine secret, God's plan for the salvation of the world, has fulfilled the God-given aspiration for communion with the divine which lay at the heart of the so-called Mystery religions of the world in which Paul was proclaiming the gospel. In the Mystery religions, the mysteries were the secret rites into which the worshippers were initiated. Paul is not suggesting that the rites of Christian worship are a mystery in that sense. In particular the mystery that has been revealed in Jesus is not a secret reserved to an elite minority. The mystery to which we as Christians have access is a far more wonderful mystery than anything that might be vouchsafed to the devotee of a Mystery religion. As Christians we have received the Holy Spirit, and so are drawn into a profound and intimate knowledge of God by virtue of our incorporation into the very body of Christ, 'in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col 2.3). That is indeed a breath-taking claim with vast implications. The mystery has now been revealed, and it is both more wonderful than we could have imagined, and more accessible than we could have supposed – Christ in you, the hope of glory. The mystery is not something out there to be discovered by much study or even the undertaking of an extensive programme of spiritual exercises, although it is good to deepen our spiritual lives, and our understanding of the faith. I hope you will take advantage of our Lent programme this year. But in the end it is the gift of God, freely and

let our minds wander away from what we are about to receive. Showing Reverence means that we are taking the receiving of Holy Communion seriously.

We can either stand or kneel to receive Holy Communion. We call the 'bread' the Host, and the 'wine' the Blood. We can receive the Host directly onto our tongues if we wish; or in our hands. We drink from the Chalice. Dipping the Host into the Chalice is not an appropriate way to receive Holy Communion as this was not instituted by our Lord at the Last Supper.

Master and Lord, Jesus Christ our God,

You alone have authority to forgive my sins, whether committed knowingly or in ignorance, and make me worthy to receive without condemnation Your divine, glorious, pure and life-giving Mysteries, not for my punishment, but for my purification and sanctification, now and in Your future Kingdom.

For You, Christ our God, are compassionate and loves mankind and to You we give glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever and ever. Amen.

Yours in Christ, Fr Leonard.