

This week I have been thinking about VE Day.

I have been giving thanks for those who made sacrifices to protect our country from the evils of Nazi-ism, both those who were members of the armed services and those ordinary members of the community who accepted loss and privation.

I have been remembering those who died, those who grew up without husbands, fathers and brothers or other loved ones and those who suffered, often in silence, from the emotional trauma of all they had seen or experienced.

And I have been imagining the celebrations 80 years ago. I have heard people talking about unalloyed joy, about spontaneous dancing in the street and the street parties organised later.

And, listening to interviews, it seems that the major feeling, at the time, was one of relief, that the killing in Europe, at least, was over, that a treasured way of life was secured and that life would gradually return to normal

The uncertainty of war would be replaced by greater certainty.

In this morning's gospel reading, the disciples too are looking for greater certainty. Tell us they say to Jesus, are you, or are you not the Messiah. Everything would be so much easier, they must have been thinking, if we knew for sure. Then we'd have a better idea of what to do.

The trouble is, of course, that nothing in life is certain,

And so, sadly, that greater certainty in the future after VE Day and that joyful relief could not last as new fears and uncertainties arose. People were still dying in the far East and it took the use of a horrific weapon to bring that to an end.

And then before long, we were into the increased uncertainty of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Cold War. While today the world seems more uncertain than ever.

We like the idea of certainty in our lives. We crave it, but it is not part of life as we have to live it.

Uncertainty is inevitable. It can be frustrating, it can be scary. But it is often within that very uncertainty and not knowing that humankind can be at its best. In the horror of war, men and women have shown extraordinary courage, self-sacrifice and acts of love.

In the quest to know ever more about the world and how it works, great discoveries and inventions have been made and though we do not always use our discoveries well, science, engineering and medicine have transformed the way we live and saved countless lives.

So, if lack of certainty and not knowing can transform and improve our physical world, can we say the same about our spiritual lives, about our faith and the way it impacts the way we live?

Let's go back to this morning's gospel. What would have happened if Jesus *had* given a straightforward yes or no answer.

If it had been no, then they'd have been back to the uncertainty of wondering when the Messiah would come. And if Jesus had yes, said then they'd still have the uncertainty of how it would have played out. Because as we know, Jesus' idea of the Messiah turned out to be very different from theirs.

And, on our own journeys of faith, we are in exactly the same position in which the disciples found themselves. Because, as in this morning's gospel reading, Jesus rarely answered a question with a simple and definitive answer preferring to speak in parables rather than with direct rules to follow.

Faith is not the same as certainty and like the disciples we often find Jesus' enigmatic answers frustrating and find ourselves wondering why he couldn't have made things a bit easier to understand.

It has taken me years of being a mum, then a teacher and more latterly a preacher to begin to understand why this should be. When we, as children or adults are learning anything from the basic three Rs to higher order skills and from an understanding of right and wrong to theology and the nature of God, we learn more effectively if we can discover it for ourselves. That is when we can truly own and rejoice in what we have learnt.

God created us capable of asking questions, of reasoning and working things out and I believe these skills are as important in our lives of faith as they were at school.

Certainty and uncertainty; faith and doubt, will always exist together.

It is in the uncertainty and the not knowing that we are led to explore our faith, to discover more about God and come to a richer and stronger relationship with him

I recently discovered a short clip from the film 'Conclave' in which Cardinal Lawrence, played by Ralph Fiennes, warns the cardinals about the sin of certainty being the enemy of unity.

"Our faith", he says, "is a living thing precisely because it walks hand in hand with doubt. If there was only certainty and no doubt, there would be no mystery and therefore no need for faith. Let us pray that God will grant us a pope who doubts. And let him grant us a pope who sins and asks for forgiveness - and carries on....."

So when we finally, whenever and however that will be, come into the closer presence of God, I don't believe any of us should be saying

“Well, I was right. That’s what I always thought it would be like.”

How much more wonderful to be saying. ‘I tried my best, but I was not really right . I could never have imagined the greatness, the wonder and the love of God. And now I rest with him.’

Thanks be to God.