

It has always been tough for most people to stay connected to their religion- Christian or otherwise. Even the most devout person of faith has gone through at least one period of spiritual dryness, when praying seems like the hardest thing in the world and no matter how much you try you cannot focus on the things of the Spirit, and you're just going through the motions.

And some people just get bored with religion in general after a while, and what seemed so wonderful and that they enjoyed so much gradually becomes a chore, and they drift away from faith and there's no guarantee that they will come back to it. Many of them do come back to it eventually, but many others find other things to fill their lives, and that's a shame- that's a shame because of course nothing satisfies us and nothing makes us happy and peaceful and fulfilled like a life lived for the Lord.

That being said, it's understandable that some people drift away from faith- the spiritual dimension of life and how we live life is not something that you can necessarily always see, and it seems so mysterious and so obscure more often than not. It's hard to hold on to something that you can't see and that you can't predict, and even the saints had their difficulties with all this. But it was their dogged determination to not take the way easy out and just give up- in other words, to accept the fact that a life of faith is not easy and can take a lot longer than we like to come to maturity and wholeness- that is a big part of what made them saints.

Even the first Christians experienced these things. When Luke was writing his Gospel, it was 50 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus and they were still waiting for Jesus to return to them- He did promise them that after all, like in today's Gospel, and if anyone you would think would keep his promises it would be Jesus.

But many of the original group of disciples who had actually been with the man Jesus and who accepted Him and His Good News- they were starting to pass away of course- time doesn't stop even for people of faith. And in any case they were getting frustrated and restless, and some even stopped caring. And we can't fault them for that- waiting for Jesus to return and bring the world to its final end is all well and good, but life goes on and these disciples had other things to worry about and other things to focus their attention on.

And besides that, what Jesus actually meant by that statement of His imminent return is debatable- most Scripture scholars say He was not speaking literally but instead in a way that was supposed to wake the people up- to wake them up enough to try to live in a manner that reflected their new faith in what God had done for the world in and through His person. So what did He really mean when He said He was going to return?

First of all, Jesus will return, but not necessarily as we have been led to believe by writers who take too many things in Scripture literally, and who forget that, as the Fathers of the Church have told us, there were many ways of speaking in Scripture that were used to communicate a truth, and not only literally. So Jesus will not physically return on the clouds at the end of the age, primarily because that implies that He was not here. As St. Irenaeus tells us, Jesus- the Son of God through whom all things were created and in whom all things exist- He was never absent from the world and never will be absent from the world.

Instead we can look at the second coming of Jesus as when the glory of Christ will be revealed in its fullness- when the complete and final revelation of Christ's presence already here in the world will be evident, in all things and in all persons- when the world will finally be rid of all the nonsense we can't seem to get away from- all the violence, the injustice, the inequality, the despair- when the Kingdom of God will be present in its fullness and the world will finally be

as God wants it to be- when we'll see that He was always here, even though we did not always act like we knew that and truly believed that.

And until then we work toward making that Kingdom of God present among us, little by little, bit by bit.

Until then we pray for the fortitude and the wisdom to live a life of faith in the midst of a crazy world and in the midst of our own crazy lives.

Until then we encourage and support those people we know who are struggling with their own lives of faith, and we help them to hold on the best they can. And if they do drift away, we never stop loving them and we continue to offer a witness to faith that means more to them than they- or even we ourselves- may realize.

Until then, we wait for the Lord, and we offer a hymn of praise and thanksgiving that He is already here.