

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

“Like new-born infants, long for the pure spiritual milk”. The writer of the letter of Peter is first and foremost an evangelist. Someone who is passionate about spreading the extraordinary story of how God sent his Son to live on earth.

And it IS – extraordinary! For many in the West, raised in a post-Enlightenment distrust of those parts of the gospel which are not down-to-earth and rational, Christianity is difficult to swallow. Which is why it is so valuable to constantly ruminate on what the gospel stories can tell us.

Recently, I was challenged by a strong-willed mature woman about how I could believe in Christianity. She easily accepts the moral and ethical teaching of Christianity, she said, but not what she termed “the magical parts”.

She didn't quite use the term “irrational” but that was probably there in her mind, too. She could have been referring to today's gospel reading. She would have probably scoffed at the idea that Jesus is the way to the Father. That “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father”.

The spiritual story of “The Way” that John refers to is that this child Jesus grew to become a spiritual teacher; to be revealed as the Son of God, and to fulfill his destiny as our guide through life. If we will only let him.

The difficulty of following on “the way” is that his way of doing things is so different to how we do things in this world. His way often looks a bit, well – soft. A bit too much of a turning of the

other cheek; a bit too little of asserting our rights, asserting our power, asserting our superiority.

Would we be prepared, as Stephen was, to be killed because our belief in this God, this man Jesus, was so fervent, so powerful, that we just couldn't pretend it meant nothing to us?

On the obverse, could we be so disturbed, so challenged by this Jesus Movement that we would go round killing people with whom we disagreed? For that is what St. Paul did, before he was confronted by the risen Jesus on that road to Damascus.

In today's terms, would that justify us hating, for instance, Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine? Or indeed, right-wing extremists in western Ukraine? Not to mention muslim extremists anywhere?

Or people who refuse to see the world; our world, the way we do? The Travelling people – or gay people – or anarchists who believe that they shouldn't have to pay for clean water, or hospitals, or ...? Or people who are hell-bent on removing any reference to belief – to faith formation – in schools.

When I was a university chaplain, I sometimes talked to Muslims from the Middle East who found it comforting to meet a westerner who believed in God. That they felt close to us, even though their tradition began more than 600 years after the time of Christ, and was a synchronous blend of Judaism, Christianity and animist traditions.

This “Way”, this belief system, started 2,000 years ago by this Jesus in Galilee, is quite a challenge to live up to. It's not just a memorial to a good man. For John's gospel today points out

that this “Way” is not only to Jesus; it is the way to God. “No-one comes to the Father except through me.”

John's gospel is not easy – it needs to be chewed over and thought about. But listen again to what he tells us: “If you know me, you will know my Father also. You know that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me.”

John's Gospel is a problem; it is the stumbling block for those who don't think they can believe in the Trinity. Because it is there today, in black and white. And next week we will hear of the third member of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit. It is quite clear, and quite definite.

And that is why I am quite comfortable to baptize people. Because the words – the theology – the spirituality of John's Gospel leaves no wriggle room. Baptism is in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

We get that authority from the words at the end of Matthew's Gospel. That we should go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in ...

It is the doctrine of the Trinity – and it is a doctrine much of which is explored and developed in John's Gospel

Remember the words from the Gospel. They aren't glib, or easy, but they are so powerful. Jesus reminds his listeners that “I am in my Father; and you in me; and I in you.”

Finally, the Letter of Peter reminds us that we are called to be evangelists - not passive believers, passive bystanders. We are “God's own people, in order that we may proclaim the

mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”.

Grab hold of this Christianity – you know it's worth it!

Amen.