

# Speaking of God

## Honest Christianity for a World Seeking Hope

### Three Faithful Doubters

The modern challenge for us is that many people listen and hear within their hearts to what or to whom *Holy Mystery* is calling them. But when they come to the Church asking for bread, asking, that is, for acceptance and communion, to be able to live as they feel called to do, we often resist them or outrightly contradict them offering them only that notorious “stone”—a stone-cold face of absolute certainty—as though we know better than they what the Holy One is asking of them.

Three examples will illustrate how difficult it can be for many people to accept the certainty with which religious leaders speak of the Holy. And religious leaders are in the habit of speaking about very important issues, matters that affect our lives at a deep level. Very personal topics such as who we love, to what we’re called, and

how we encounter the Holy, are often the subject of ecclesial pronouncements that are absolute.

Throughout history, the churches have had to keep up as science, philosophy, psychology, and medicine—not to mention theology itself—have matured and grown. Let’s meet three “faithful doubters.”





## Sr. Jean Marie

I know a faithful woman, a religious sister, who spent her life working in the Church. She was a gifted woman, able to touch and heal, with a heart that went out to everyone. Her contribution to the people she served was enormous and she often said how terrific her calling was. Except for one thing. She was clearly called to ministry, but in her heart, where the voice of God echoes, she also experienced a profound call to *priesthood and ordination* in the Catholic Church which does not call women to ordination.

For many years, she kept this call to herself and her closest friends but it “tortured” her with its insistence so, she finally told her bishop and asked to be ordained. He told her in no uncertain terms that she was wrong. “God cannot call women,” he said. “Are you sure?” she asked. “Certain,” he said. “How does this bishop know that?” she asked me. “How does he know to what God may be calling me? Who does he think he is?”

## Ken and Joan

I have known this couple for many years. They’re devoted members of their parish and parents to four sturdy sons. Joan and Ken are committed to each other and have a very happy marriage. In his local church, Ken was an active leader, a liturgical minister, and visitor of the sick. He loved his faith and he loved his church. But then their oldest son came to them one day to tell them that he’s gay. Honestly, they weren’t surprised and they assured him that their love knew no bounds. When he brought home the man he loved and wanted to marry, they were overjoyed for him as they all started planning the wedding.

Overjoyed, that is, until the local bishop took it on himself to respond to the increasing acceptance of same-gender marriages and announced from on high that the Church would never bless a gay union “because homosexuals are disordered.”



When Ken and Joan asked their parish priest about this, the priest defended the bishop and told them, “God would never bless a sin.” “Are you sure?” Joan asked. “Certain,” the priest said. “How does this priest know it’s a sin?” Ken asked me. “How does he know what God may be doing in the life of my son?” “Marriage is a vocation and my son and his partner experience the clear call to a faithful, monogamous, free, and loving marriage. This is a blessing, not a sin. Who does this priest think he is?”

## Sandra

I know a woman who recently attended a conference in which the task of the presenter was to explain the basis of the Christian faith. After his introduction, the speaker began to explain what he called “the essentials of our faith” having to do with Jesus dying for our sins. After he had talked for half an hour or so, he paused and asked if there were questions. Sandra went to the microphone.



“So,” she started, “let me see if I understand you. You’re saying that in the beginning there was literally a garden and an apple and a woman and a snake?” “Yup. Pretty much,” he said. She looked at him in disbelief. “Really?” she asked, looking at him over her glasses. “*Literally?*”

He was silent so she went on: “And you’re saying that God was angry with us so, he closed the gates of heaven and turned away from us?” “That’s correct,” the speaker said. Sandra wasn’t finished. “But all along, throughout all those years, God knew he was sending his son to earth and then he permitted or even required that his own child would be tortured, humiliated, and violently murdered in public? And in all of this, Jesus was somehow a substitute for us—all to satisfy God?”

“And that’s why Jesus died,” the speaker finished. “For your sins.”

“So, wait,” Sandra went on, “I’m sorry,” but I just don’t see any evidence in the gospels to support this way of thinking. What about the teachings of Jesus about forgiveness, the mercy he showed to those women, the way he treated Zacchaeus, the story he told about the father waiting at the gate for his son...If God is truly all about mercy, wouldn’t God forgive us before we even ask for it?” She paused. The room was very quiet. She went on. “Does any of this matter at all to what you’re saying?”

“Don’t try to confuse the truth,” the speaker said, “with quotes from the Gospel. God asked Jesus to die for your sins, and that’s that.”

“Are you sure?” she asked. “Certain,” he said. “Well, that doesn’t sound very much like the father of that prodigal son,” she finished.