

My granddaughters regularly remind me that I am now an ancient person. I'm getting close to another of those birthdays which divides exactly by ten, and I have quaintly antique ideas about life and manners, like reading books with real pages, writing with a pen, and not using my phone at mealtimes. I'm clearly a registered pedant as well, though that started many years ago. I do realise that language evolves and changes, but I still wince when people say 'reticent' instead of 'reluctant', or mix up 'less' and 'fewer', or think that something being decimated is a much worse disaster than it actually is. Not to mention the proliferation of awful acronyms brought about by the advent of text-speak and Twitter. I quite understand why David Cameron thought that LOL meant 'lots of love'. But I did come across one, a while back, which strikes me as being very apposite for today (and it wasn't Nomophobia, which is the fear of being without one's mobile phone. I'm not entirely sure where mine is, but I do know that it's switched off and won't suddenly ring in the middle of the service.)

The acronym is FOMO, which stands for Fear Of Missing Out, and is apparently a major problem. Everyone else is having a splendid time, WhatsApped, tweeted and Facebooked as it happens, duly airbrushed and Photoshopped to look fantastic, but somehow your life just doesn't match up. So many people, particularly younger ones, feel themselves under tremendous pressure all the time. They have to look amazing, wear the latest clothes, eat the most photogenic food (pink is good, I gather, and what it tastes like is much less important), and party at the trendiest places, all to show that every minute of their lives is full of full-on fun. The result? Quite often, serious depression.

So why is FOMO the word for today? The term may be new but the idea goes back for centuries, all the way back to that room somewhere in Jerusalem where the disciples had hidden themselves after the crucifixion. The room in which, although the doors were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them. They hadn't believed what the women had told them that morning, but suddenly there he was, looking and talking as he always had.

But Thomas wasn't there. We're not told why; maybe he'd gone to buy food, or he needed some exercise, or he had to check on his family. It might have been anything. When he did get back, instead of the downcast, frightened bunch of people he had left, he was confronted with an ecstatic, jabbering mob of disciples falling over themselves to tell him what they'd seen.

Thomas was a loyal disciple; not one of the inner circle but someone who asked intelligent questions and showed unswerving loyalty. He was the one who had urged the other disciples to go with Jesus when he went up to Jerusalem in that last fatal week. But now, just because he had gone out for a while, he'd missed it. He wouldn't have known the word, but he was experiencing the biggest attack of FOMO of all time. He'd missed the Resurrection! It wasn't the sort of thing that was likely to happen again. There wouldn't be another one along in a minute or two. Imagine how he must have felt. He hadn't tried to claim a seat in heaven beside Jesus (like James and John), or betrayed him (like Judas), or lied about knowing him (like Peter). What had he done to be excluded like this? What would the other disciples be thinking about him, now that Jesus had left him out? How could he even be part of the team, when they had all had this extraordinary experience, but he hadn't? How could this be happening to him? No wonder he couldn't believe what he was told. Unless he could see what they had seen, he couldn't feel that he belonged with them, let alone shared their enthusiasm.

Thomas had to wait a whole dismal, hopeless week – and then Jesus appeared again, just as unexpectedly, and came straight to him. And suddenly Thomas wasn't different, he hadn't done anything terrible, he wasn't an outcast, and he could believe and rejoice with them all. The

despair he had suffered made the wonder and elation all the more intense, and he could be the first to say: 'My Lord and my God!'

FOMO is a familiar experience for many Christians – so common that they sometimes wonder if they are really proper Christians at all. It's particularly difficult in communities where people are very talkative and 'up front' about their faith. When you are struggling to pray, or feel for whatever reason that God has abandoned you or you've let God down, it can be hard to be with people who share their intense spiritual experiences with enthusiasm, who speak in tongues or give dramatic personal testimonies, or who just know that Jesus walks with them every day. It is particularly difficult at Easter, when everyone else is rejoicing, the music is triumphant and the church is filled with alleluias, but you just want to go and hide. You may have lived a holy Lent, but it doesn't seem to be over. You may be at a point in your life where happiness and joy are impossible – but everyone says: 'Happy Easter!' and you have to reciprocate. How can you say to anyone that – at this moment – there isn't any sort of resurrection for you?

It's even harder when some good-natured person, trying to be sympathetic, tells you that all the disciples had to live through Holy Saturday. So they did, but Thomas had to wait an interminable seven more days all on his own, while everyone around him was celebrating. If Easter is fulfilling for you this year, that's wonderful. Christ is risen indeed – Alleluia! But if you are feeling like Thomas, left out, let down, desperate for an end to the despair, take comfort. If you can find someone to talk to and pray with in the gloom, that will help. Hang on to whatever sliver of faith you still have and, in his own time, Christ will come to you, too. And it will be so much more wonderful, because you have waited so long.