I got a bit worried about myself over Christmas.

I found myself getting a bit holy and it came as a bit of a shock!

I need to explain. I kept being drawn into wanting to DO kind and thoughtful things rather than shop before Christmas. What happened to the lovely buzz I used to get when spending hours plodding around the shops trying to find gifts for family and friends? It just wasn't there. I found myself feeling it was all too materialistic - buying gifts that would end up having my loved ones lying to me pretending they liked them! And I didn't like feeling that way one little bit! Where were the lovely, self-delusional, rose-tinted spectacles that had been firmly attached to my face in years gone by?

And even worse - I didn't feel driven to buy "The Christmas Outfit". It wasn't that I felt too fat and frumpy (as has often been the case), it was that I felt I had enough clothes and didn't need or want anything new. Now, that's an awful way to feel - I've always got a buzz out of buying new clothes - I mean, that was one of life's great joys for me. And, on that continuing downward spiral, I wasn't even overly concerned about how I looked. ME! Oh, I wouldn't have admitted to it in the past (not out loud, anyway), but vanity always dictated my mood - if I felt I looked okay, I was fairly upbeat and a low grade inner misery shrouded me on those days I felt fat, frumpy and ugly.

In the past, I often looked at those who didn't like shopping for clothes and those who weren't concerned with their appearance with a kind of disdainful pity - sure their life wasn't worth living! Surely I couldn't be turning into one of them!

I had no interest in Christmas parties this year. I wanted to touch base with old friends, but not in the context of the being out in big gatherings, doing the "12 pubs of Christmas" or any such partying. Meeting a couple of friends at a time for coffee or lunch was my preference.

And I think the biggest shock (that dreadful feeling of "holiness" I experienced) was when I found myself critical of something the priest said at the end of Mass on Christmas morning. After a rather predictable sermon where he told us of the great gift that God had given us etc.etc., he ended the celebration of the Eucharist by saying "That's the praying out of the way for the day. You can go out and enjoy the day now". It struck me forcibly that, for the priest, and probably for most of the congregation, the Mass on Christmas morning (and presumably every other morning) was the holy bit that had to be got "out of the way" so that REAL living could continue. And there was I feeling *critical* of such a thought - ME, who for most of my fifty seven years would have felt exactly the same way! There I was, saying to myself "Sure the Mass is part of the enjoyment of life - not something separate".

Oh God! When did I get so holy? And WHY? Is it just that I'm getting old and finding myself more concerned with the spiritual side of life than I ever did before? Perish the thought. I'm not ready to start feeling old yet - I still have to grow up! But I'm looking at people participating in the frantic busyness of the season and hoping they are at peace inside - hoping that they feel the real joy that Christmas should help us feel every year. I'm hoping that they feel the love of a God whose very existence they may not even accept or be aware of in their lives. Oh dear - even to my own ears it sounds suspiciously like I might be PRAYING for them!

And that is a terrible prospect. I'm such an "anti-holy" type of person that the notion that I might be "turning" is truly upsetting. You see, the vision I have of "holy people" is that they are the "holier-than-thou" brigade - those people who view the world in terms of "MY church, MY beliefs are the only true path to salvation, and those who don't accept that I know better than they do, are simply wrong."

And the weird paradox in all of this is that, in the past, before I embarked on this path that has led me to experience my current virus of "holiness", I actually prescribed to that notion to a greater or lesser degree. When my spirituality was somewhat superficial, when I was a good Irish Catholic, I DID have the belief that the teachings of the traditional Catholic faith WERE the absolute truth. Well, maybe I didn't fully believe it, but I just didn't "go there" as far as to question it was concerned - I just lived my small wee, undeveloped faith life - fulfilling the duties of a good Catholic (most of the time) and not thinking too deeply about those teachings/ structures that didn't sit too well with me in my inner heart.

It is only in recent years, after having had to ask myself if, indeed, I could or should stay within Catholicism, since I have acknowledged that I can't accept all of it blindly and that I HAVE to challenge those aspects of it that my conscience cannot accept, that I realise I WANT to stay part of it.

And it has led me to a place where, although I am now a "revolting" Catholic, I feel I have a more developed spirituality and can recognise and openly acknowledge the centrality of God in my life. I find it truly ironic that, when I feel my relationship with my Creator and all of creation is deepening, there are those within my Catholic family who feel I should get out - I don't belong! Where I find that I can accept that other people's truths can be different but just as valid as mine: where I find I don't have to believe that, for me to be right, others have to be wrong: where I can be open to learning and understanding more all the time from all kinds of diverse sources, I keep encountering those within Catholicism who insist that I am wrong.

I have no problem with THEIR holding very firm, honest and sincere beliefs. I respect and admire them for it. I just wish that they could afford me the same respect.

I don't ever know with certainty that I am RIGHT - I cannot ever make such a claim. But I know when I'm following my conscience. It always starts with my NOT wanting to do so! There's a protective armour in me that tells me NOT to do/think/believe something because it will expose me and make me vulnerable. But the deeper part of me says "You know this is the path you must follow to become a more authentic person - to be a more real you". And when I DO step out and follow the path, I feel at peace.

And I guess that's where I am with my new-found "holiness" right now. I'm not comfortable using such words, but I kinda know that it's God-within-me that pushes me into "stepping out".

I don't make New Year's Resolutions. They're a sure fire path to failure. But I suspect that 2014 might be a year when I have to come further out of the closet in terms of being "holy". Darn it! I don't actually WANT to be a "Holy Jo".   [Jo O'Sullivan]