

ADVENT
Happy Liturgical New Year

"Greater things than these will you do....."

The Gospel records Jesus as having said, *"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."* [John 5:20]

I have heard many people today say things like, "What Would Jesus Do?" As a follower of Jesus I have come to understand that a more appropriate question might be, "What am I doing as a disciple of Jesus?" Jesus made it rather clear that he did not come "to be served" or "worshipped" but rather to "serve" people. Jesus also challenged others to go into the entire world to practice and preach the good news. After he sent out the seventy-two in pairs they came back saying wow – *"The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'*" [Luke 10:17] From the time of the prophets and continuing after Jesus we have stories of many people using their ability to do amazing things in service to others.

Most of these stories are about people who were actually rather ordinary. The one common thread that is a significant part of their lives we call FAITH [Finding Authenticity In Today's Happenings]. They often seemed to have a calling and an awareness of the presence of God in their lives that enable them to grow and develop in ways that many people do not have. Advent begins a New Year in our Lectionary and we become a people who are stirred up again to receive this presence of God made known to us in the coming of Jesus. In our Blog, "Learning to Live Well", we opened with our 21st Century awareness of a Universe that is filled with Possibilities, Probabilities, and Productivity. This advent of God's love and grace is made known to us through our faith in the Christmas message and our growing knowledge and understanding of the creation.

We are shown that each person is gifted in extraordinary ways to become all that they can be in doing greater things than any of us can imagine. Given the history of past progress we can rejoice and be grateful for how far we have come, especially in recent years, to experiencing the wonderful and almost magical advancement in every area of our lives. As more and more people throughout the world are awakened and stirred each year, as our Advent Season suggests, we can hardly imagine the spectacular revelations of new things that might come to be. The story and pageantry of Jesus' birth is rich with God's creativity among us allowing everyone to live into this universal message. Like the child Jesus we can become vessels of possibilities yet unimagined. Allowing ourselves to be open to unexpected probabilities, we too can be purveyors of the necessary productivity to serve humankind in helpful ways. All we need is the HOPE [Habitually Open Productive Exploration] that is announced in the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

Throughout our Judaic Christian scriptures we are told many times that each of us is gifted and enabled in our creativity to bring this hope into our world. It is vital that we extend ourselves in humility to be present in our world to serve more than an expectation to be served. It is also important that we recognize who we are as the people of God in order to be comfortable and certain in serving as Jesus did. To accept this privilege and responsibility we need to understand who Jesus really was. What is the primary belief about Jesus early in church history until today?

Most Christian churches believe and teach that Jesus is both human and divine. “Christology is a field of study within Christian theology that is concerned with the nature of Jesus Christ, particularly with how the divine and human are related in his person. Christology is generally less concerned with the details of Jesus' life than with how the human and divine co-exist in one person.” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divinity_of_Jesus] This seems to be a doctrine that is hard for most people to comprehend, especially in our Western way of understanding. We tend to think in terms of “right or wrong”, “black or white”, “up or down” so our natural way of thinking is “either / or” and not “both / and”. *“For all practical purposes, the dualistic mind is not able to accept the orthodox teaching from the Council of Nicea that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine at the same time. It does not compute with our computer! Our dualistic method of thinking needs to split and divide, with the result that it understands Jesus as only divine and understands human beings as only human, despite all scriptural and mystical affirmations to the contrary. The overcoming of this divide was the whole point of the Incarnation of God in Christ. The results for Christianity, and for individual Christians, have been truly disastrous.”* [pgs. 67-68, “The Naked Now – Learning to See as the Mystics See”, Richard Rohr – The Crossroad Publishing Co., NY, NY (Richard Rohr is a Franciscan Friar)]

In attempting to be brief with this difficult and continuing conceptual problem I will share a common question that may help, “Which came first – the Chicken or the Egg”? This question has seldom solved our dilemma but another question may help get to my point; *“Is a person a human being trying to become spiritual or a spiritual being trying to become human”?* What was Jesus trying to teach us when we hear his prayer in the Gospel, *“I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one...”* [John 17:22 – see also 17:20-26] Could it not be more like what the apostle says in Romans that we are chosen *“to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”* [see Romans 8:28-30] Perhaps this is why so many Christians use the term catholic, with a small “c”, as an adjective meaning all-inclusive, useful to all or all embracing. People who wish to be inclusive where all are truly welcome as in “both / and” and not definitively “either / or”. Do we really need to know which comes first in order to fulfill our true destiny? Can we become comfortable with thinking about ourselves as both human and spiritual?

Perhaps we should look back to our roots, *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.”* [<http://www.the-ten-commandments.org/the-ten-commandments.html>] *“We believe in one God the Father Almighty,”* [<http://www.creeds.net/ancient/nicene.htm>] Again in the doctrine of the Trinity, as confusing as it may be to many, there is a clear declaration that God is one. [<http://www.theopedia.com/Trinity>] Once more in the doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus we have a firm statement of the one. *“The Orthodox doctrine of Christ incarnate is: True God and true man, one person in two natures, without separation and without confusion: a single person, but endowed with two wills and two energies.”* [<http://orthodoxwiki.org/Incarnation>] An example may be found in the actual way that we see with our eyes. *“In a single glance, lasting a fraction of a second, our eyes work with our brains to tell us the size, shape, color, and texture of an object. They let us know how close it is, whether it's standing still or coming toward us, and how quickly it's moving. Every day, our eyes give us messages that help us understand the world around us.”* [http://kidshealth.org/parent/general/body_basics/eyes.html] It is our brain that takes the two separate images and brings them together to give us the whole picture. Could it be that we concentrate too much on these visions of dual or triple personages so as to lose the wholeness of the total picture? Is this caution contained in the second commandment? [<http://www.the-ten-commandments.org/the-ten-commandments.html>]

In almost every area of our lives and in our living together on this planet we are becoming more divided and divisive as humans. Not only between cultures and countries but we continue to become more divided between religions and political parties. Unfortunately most denominations are splitting apart because of doggedness for purity and agreement on every issue or teaching. In our growing insistence on uniformity we are losing all ability for unity. On the other hand, as we look back, people have been divided and divisive as far back as we can determine. It appears that my sandbox is better than your sandbox is the continuing human cry. In spite of this we continue to hear the call to peace and unity with an apparent desire to work together for the benefit of all. An overarching theme of Christmas was, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”* [Luke 2:14]

We live in a marvelous time because there are so many in recent years that favor us with new ways of thinking about life. People who are searching for new ways, especially in science, are bringing new hope by finding in nature solutions that may already exist. On December 13, 2009, I watched a segment on 60 Minutes about a regenerative dust that can stimulate organ growth. It was a revelation of how exciting our world can be as one examines all its possibilities. You may be able to watch this by using the link in this footnote.[xiv] (note: it is the 2nd story of the program – click on the 2nd “time line” in the movie)

The story on 60 Minutes tells about these aspects of regrowth: “Extracellular Matrix cells have been found to cause regrowth and healing of tissue. In human fetuses, for example, the extracellular matrix works with stem cells to grow and regrow all parts of the human body, and fetuses can regrow anything that gets damaged in the womb. Scientists have long believed that the matrix stops functioning after full development. It has been used in the past to help horses heal torn ligaments, but it is being researched further as a device for tissue regeneration in humans.”[xv] “For medical applications, the cells required are usually extracted from pig bladders, an easily accessible and relatively unused source. It is currently being used regularly to treat ulcers by closing the hole in the tissue that lines the stomach, but further research is currently being done by many universities as well as the U.S. Government for wounded soldier applications. As of early 2007, testing was being carried out on a military base in Texas. Scientists are using a powdered form on Iraq War veterans whose hands were damaged in the war.”[xvi]

Maybe we do not need conversion as much as convergence. Conversion is reminiscent of older times of right/wrong, either/or like my way/your way. The atmosphere of conversion tends to bring divisive division. Convergence, like the magic of our eyesight brings duality together to enhance and provide the excellent vision we enjoy. Most of the gifts we have received for advancement, healing and a better life have come from bringing together the varied talents of the many to serve and embellish our world.

Almost every religious tradition has something like the beginning of our yearly liturgical calendar called Advent. It is a time to call all of us forth to wake up and smell the coffee. We are invited again to use all of our senses and human intelligence to continue anew in ways that inspire and bring forth new things. While looking at progress from our past and dreaming about new possibilities for the future we are encouraged to use today’s productively.

Christmas is the Christian story to call our attention to God’s presence among us. Coming humbly to us as a little child, reminding us of what can appear through the innocence of new life. Recognizing that we have the gift of this universe as the angels sing us the glorious song from the heavens.

Aware that the common folk are present and included, along with animal life, to nourish us with all goodness as we gather in the presence of God. Even the whole world is present in the representation of the wise men coming from afar to complete our understanding that their leadership and witness is also essential to success in becoming all that we can be.

Lastly, what about “peace on earth”? Was not the coming of Jesus supposed to bring peace on earth? May I suggest that Jesus came to announce the “Kingdom of God” and said that this Realm of God is present with us always? Could it not be that peace is not an “either/or” but a “both/and”? When people on earth of good will experience God’s love and power and express that love in powerful ways we will cause the changes necessary to have peace. Peace is not God or us, but God and us. I like to use this acronym for peace [People Energizing Alternatives Causing Equality]. When we do everything we can to effect alternatives that will celebrate and cause the equality of God’s love and power to be properly shared, then the world will experience this peace. Faith, hope, and love – the greatest of these is love!

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God’s love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.