

Scripture for November 30, 2008

Reflection from John Surette, SJ

Evil and God's Love

In today's first reading from the Prophet Isaiah (63:16-17) we hear the people crying out: "Why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your ways?" "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you." In other words they are saying: Why don't you come down, intervene in our lives, and make things better for us?

Do these words sound familiar to you? Today many believers cry out to God: "Why do you allow so much evil to happen – wars and terrorism, Aids and cancer, poverty and hunger, hurricanes and earthquakes?" "Why is it that there is so much bad news these days and so little good

In all of this we are dealing with the problem of evil, a problem that has never been completely answered. Two things, at least, can be said.

The first is that we need to move away from the dominant image of God as being at a distance up in heaven; God who needs to "rend the heavens and come



down", causing the mountains to quake. We need to embrace the image of God as being not without but within. We need to embrace the Creator God who is present and acting within the entire Creation and therefore within our individual lives. God is not up in the balcony of the theatre, as it were, watching our lives playing out

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on the stage of life. Rather, God is up on the stage, knowing, as Scripture says, even if a “sparrow falls to the ground.”

The second thing to be said is that our God who is present and acting within the entire Creation and therefore within our individual lives is a God who has great respect for freedom.

Like loving human parents who respect the freedom of their slowly maturing children and with self-restraint allow the children to discover the contours of their own lives. The parents even go to the extent of giving their children space to make mistakes and get into difficulties, but always inviting them into greater maturity. In a similar manner our loving God does not manipulate or control us but exercises that self-restraint befitting the

Divine Love and allows our lives to unfold each at its own pace and in its own particular way. We humans are even given the freedom to make big mistakes like the dropping of the Atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and our present diminishment and destruction of Earth’s life systems.

God also respects freedom in the other-than-human creatures. God allows the Earth to quake, volcanoes to erupt, hurricanes to hurry, cells to become cancerous, mosquitoes to bite, and gravity to work causing babies to fall out of their cribs. There is no forcing here. There is no interfering here. God respects the inner dynamics of the whole Universe and allows each thing to be itself and to unfold according to its own nature, its own laws, and its own spontaneities.

So, if God respects freedom and does not intervene, the question arises: What does God do? At least two things can be said.

First, God fills the Universe with a Creative Energy. That Energy has been present since the beginning and has been unfolding the Universe for the past

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fourteen billion years. Think of it...fourteen billion years of creativity...the galaxies, the stars, and Earth with its ocean, rocks, plants, animals, and us humans. That same Creative Energy is also available to you and me in our lives at the present moment. When we engage in petitionary prayer we are desiring that this Energy do its work within our own lives, our world, and our Planet.

Second, God is always holding out before us the possibility of something better. God is always promising an Easter Sunday to emerge out of all our Good Fridays. God is always presenting us with many possibilities for our lives including the possibility of transforming this present moment and therefore all future moments. It is a transformation that is possible for us because of the presence of God's pervasive and persuading love within us.

On this First Sunday of Advent let us be aware of the Creative Energy at work within us and let us embrace God's pervasive and persuading Love coursing through our souls!

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