

February 22, 2009

Reflection from John Surette, SJ

Something new

“Remember not the events of the past, consider not the things of long ago; see, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

This message was somewhat strange to the Israelites as they were a people of memory, the memory of Yahweh’s mighty past deeds on their behalf, especially leading them out of Egypt through the desert into the Promised Land.

Isaiah does not throw out the past but he does call upon the people to look beyond it. They were too dependent on their past, on their tradition, and so they were blind to perceiving the newness that Yahweh was bringing about.

Something similar happened to many Catholics after the Second Vatican Council back in the sixties and seventies. Perhaps some of you in the chapel today remember? The changes, the newness, brought about by the Council were experienced as shocking by many. It seemed that the Church was abandoning some of its sacred tradition in favor of some untested new things, for example, moving from Latin into English in the liturgy.



The Church responded by saying that we should not be so totally dependent on the past but be open and embracing of what is new and what is unfolding as a response to the modern times in which we find ourselves.

The Well

*A Center for our
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If we look at the Story of God's Universe, we will see that it too is a history defined by change and by newness.

13.7 billion years ago, out of a creative nothingness, the Universe flared into existence. It was total surprise. It was a newness. 5 billion years ago, out of the cosmic dust resulting from the explosion of a star, our planet Earth formed. It was total surprise. It was a newness.

520 million years ago, responding to evolutionary dynamics, fish emerged within Earth's ocean. It was total surprise. It was a newness. 130 million years ago, flowers, in all their colors and fragrances, began to spread across the Planet. It was total surprise. It was a newness.

Some 150,000 years ago, the first humans, in all their beauty and unpredictability, appeared in East Africa. They were total surprise. They were a newness.

Some 2000 years ago, in Bethlehem of Judea, Jesus of Nazareth was born and later proclaimed God's Reign of justice, peace, and love throughout all of Galilee. He was total surprise. He was a newness.

Whatever your age is today, it was that many years ago that you appeared within your mother's womb. You were total surprise. You were a newness. There never has been and there never will be another you.

God's Universe values surprise, values newness. What each one of us will create within our lives today will be a newness. What our Church will create in this time of its testing will be a newness. What all peoples will do to reverse the diminishment and destruction of Earth's eco-systems will be a newness.

We cannot go into the future without our past, our tradition, but these cannot lead us there. We need to look beyond the past and not hold on too tightly to the tradition. What leads us into the future are our imaginations, our creativities, our dreams, and our allurements. We are not so much people of the past as we are people of the future....people of that newness that God is promising and that newness that God is bringing about through our efforts.

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