

Scripture for June 8, 2008

Reflection from John Surette, SJ

Love, not sacrifice

Our first reading today speaks of God's frustration with the people: "What am I going to do with you, Ephraim? What am I going to do with you, Judah?... it is love that I desire, not sacrifice."

There are numerous references to sacrifice in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the time of Abraham, it seems that human sacrifice was a tolerated practice in the culture as is evidenced by Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac.

In the time of Jesus, the sacrifice of animals was prevalent in the temple rituals. As an offering for the redemption of their first-born son, the poor offered a pair of turtledoves or a pair of young pigeons. The parents of Jesus made this sacrificial offering when they brought Jesus to the temple to present him to the Lord.

The offering of a sacrifice is not something unfamiliar to people of faith in modern times. Some of us are into sacrifice in small ways, for example,



When we give up some pleasure during Lent or when we "offer-up" our sufferings or something unwanted that appears on the menus of our lives.

Many of us are into sacrifice in big ways. Take, for example, the sacrifices that teens

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make when they turn away from their own needs and reach out in love to others. Or, consider the sacrifices that parents make so that their children might enjoy more abundant lives, sacrifices obviously motivated by love.

So, let us turn our attention from sacrifice to love. Love is what is required. In our Christian tradition the word love does not refer to the warm and gushy feelings that we associate with romance. It does refer to the entering into and nurturing of authentic and life-giving relationships.

Yes, relationships! “Who is my neighbor?” With whom am I interdependent? With whom do I have a mutuality?

With whom do I have a reciprocity? With whom do I have an interconnection? With whom do I have an affiliation? With whom do I have a kinship?

Generally speaking, in the Hebrew Scriptures the relationships are with one’s own tribe, one’s own people, and include only those who are ritually clean. In the Christian scriptures the relationships also include the outcasts, the down-pressed, and those who are ritually unclean.

In this 21st century, with the awareness that we are part of a 13.7 billion year old evolving Universe, our relational consciousness has expanded exponentially. It is now as large as the Universe.

Because 13.7 billion years of things have happened, each of us has happened. In a radical way each of us is connected to all that has occurred over cosmic time. Within the unfolding of the Universe every reality is in relationship with every other reality and with the Universe itself. It is the interrelated of the whole of God’s Universe that is fundamental.

In the 13th century, a mystic by the name of Hildegard of Bingen wrote the following: “Everything that is in the heavens, on the Earth, and under the Earth is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness.” Another way to put it is that our relationships are with everyone and everything that participates in the great mystery of existence.

A present day Vietnamese monk whose name is Thich Nhat Hanh speaks about “interbeing.” We cannot just be by ourselves, alone. We have to inter-be with every other being.

Our fulfillment is not to be found in some intra-human or inter-human solitude but in our relationship with all members of the Universe. We need to truly come home to these relationships. They all are part of your truth and mine.

Relationships are the secret law of life and of God’s Universe.

As we grow in our awareness of the inter-relatedness of everyone and everything we grow into becoming mystics!

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