

Sermon

Sunday 19 August 2018

Lessons

1Kings 2: 10 – 12, 3: 3 – 14

St John 6: 51 – 58

The American Franciscan friar Richard Rohr writes:

The great mystics tend to recognise that Whoever God Is, he or she does not need our protection or perfect understanding. All our words, dogmas, and rituals are like children playing in a sandbox before Infinite Mystery and Wonderment. If anything is true, then it has always been true; and people who sincerely search will touch upon the same truth in every age and culture, while using different language, symbols, and rituals to point us in the same direction. The direction is always toward more love and union—in ever widening circles.

Rohr says our words, dogmas and rituals are like children playing in a sandbox before the Infinite Mystery. It has always seemed to me that the One who holds this universe in being, in all its evolutionary complexity, is well beyond our cognitive capacity to grasp. God is a single Reality: God is Being, Tao, Father, Allah, Mother, YHWH, Brahman, Great Spirit and many other names. The Jewish mystical teacher Rabbi Rami Shapiro writes:

To me, religions are like languages: no language is true or false; all languages are of human origin; each language reflects and shapes the civilization that speaks it; there are things you can say in one language that you cannot say as well in another; and the more languages you speak, the more nuanced your understanding of life becomes. Judaism is my mother tongue, yet in matters of the spirit I strive to be multilingual.

Insofar as we can, we are to strive to be multilingual. Within the Hindu

tradition, in the writing of the Upanishads, we read:

In the beginning was only Being; One without a second.
Out of himself he brought forth the cosmos and entered into
everything in it. There is nothing that does not come from
him. Of everything he is the inmost Self.

Does that sound familiar? In the Gospel of John, we read:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. Through him all things came to be,
and not one thing had its being but through him. . . . And the
Word became flesh and dwells among us.

Within the Jewish tradition, there is a short prayer to be said each day on
waking: ‘I thank you, Eternal King, that You have returned within me
my soul with compassion; how abundant is Your faithfulness!’ Each
sleep is like a death and each waking a rebirth, a resurrection. Within
Judaism, there is a wonderful story of a great rabbi:

who had many students who hung on his every word. One
morning, the students were surprised to find their rabbi was
not at breakfast. Later, they were surprised to discover he did
not come to the classroom, either. The students wondered
where he was. Finally, they knocked on his door, wondering
what had befallen their beloved teacher. They opened the door,
and were surprised to find their rabbi, still in his night clothes,
sitting up in his bed, a dazed expression on his face.

‘Rabbi, are you ill? Where have you been all day?’ they asked.
The rabbi gazed at his students and said, ‘This morning, as every
morning, I awoke and immediately said the prayer upon arising:
I thank you, Eternal King.... And then I stopped as the words hit
me. I thank G-d? I...thank...G-d? Students, do you realise
what a privilege this is, to commune with the Almighty? I realised

the power of this statement! And I have been sitting here pondering the greatness of this ever since!’

Do we ponder communion with God, our union with the Eternal? In this sacred space, in our home or in the park, we stop that for a fleeting moment and in the best way we can, we unite ourselves to the Infinite Mystery, the single Reality, Being, Tao, Father, Allah, Mother, YHWH, Brahman, Great Spirit. In our tradition, we gaze at that reality through the life, words, and soul of Jesus. We cannot speak of God without speaking also of Jesus, *Jeshua*, a rabbi from Nazareth. In our Old Testament lesson, we heard the prayer of Solomon, of the king praying for wisdom, understanding and discernment between good and evil. Above all, Solomon sought alignment with God: he desired to do God’s will; in his life, to be at one with the Holy One. Solomon worshipped YHWH, the God of his father, David.

In our Gospel lesson, we listened to the words of Jesus, words which on the face of it may offend our sensibilities. Teaching in the synagogue, Jesus said, ‘Those who eat My flesh and drink My blood have eternal life.....for My flesh is true food and My blood is true drink.....Those who eat My flesh and drink My blood abide in Me, and I in them.’ This cannot mean cannibalism because His body would not feed many people. This is spiritual teaching. This evocative, if not grotesque, metaphor

suggest we are to take on the life and character of Jesus; we are to be one with Him, one with the Father, one with the single Reality. Calvin described the Eucharist as ‘the holy meat and drink of eternal life’. He said the bread and wine are ‘a true symbol of the Divine Presence’.

The first century Jewish philosopher, Philo, said that the manna which the people of Israel received in the desert was the wisdom of God. The people fed on the wisdom of God. In Jewish mysticism, eating manna means transmuting holiness into matter. Eating manna dissolved the divide between God and humanity. John’s Gospel began by telling us that the Word or Wisdom of God was reflected in Jesus of Nazareth. When Jesus said, ‘Eat My flesh; drink My blood’, He intended that we are to feed on the Wisdom of God; we are to feed on God, on the Presence, on the *Shekinah*.

I hope you see that the core purpose of religion is our alignment with God. We are to feast on the Sacred, the One with a thousand names, the Mystery whose true name we could never know. The French paleontologist and priest Teilhard de Chardin prayed, ‘Lord Christ, you who are divine energy and living irresistible might: since of the two of us it is you who are infinitely the stronger, it is you who must set me ablaze and transmute me into fire that we may be welded together and made

one.’ De Chardin saw God everywhere, in and through all things: an expansive vision of God, of Christ in which the whole of creation is the bread and wine, the sacramental elements. On a hillside without bread and wine to hand, caught up in a mystic vision, De Chardin wrote:

Lord....I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole world my altar and on it will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world.

Over there, on the horizon, the sun has just touched with light the outermost fringe of the eastern sky. Once again, beneath this moving sheet of fire, the living surface of the earth wakes and, once again, begins its fearful travail. I will place on my paten, O God, the harvest to be won by this renewal of labour. Into my chalice I shall pour all the sap which is to be pressed out this day from the earth’s fruits.

My chalice and my paten are the depths of a soul laid widely open to all the forces which in a moment will rise up from every corner of the earth and converge upon the Spirit. Grant me the remembrance and the mystic presence of all those whom the light is now awakening to a new day.

De Chardin saw the fabric of the cosmos as sacrament, mattered transmuted, transfigured. God will not be confined to our sandboxes.

Amen.