

Lent 5
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

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Image of God

This is the final installment of a 5-part sermon for Lent. In installment 1 your Lenten discipline was surrender, surrender to the fact that to answer the big questions your ego is of no help whatsoever. Dualistic thinking cannot get us to the place where we can love selflessly. In installment 2 your Lenten discipline was to look for the bigger picture. The categories set up by the ego are self-referential. Nothing fits a category perfectly except in the ego's mind. Notice the inconsistencies, and let your categories be broken open. In installment 3 your Lenten discipline was to embrace your pain for love's sake. Love and Suffering are the two great paths into the unitive mind, and they often come together. In installment 4 your Lenten discipline was to take a long, loving look at the real. Not things as you wish they were, or are afraid they might be, but as they truly are, in their uniqueness, beauty and wonder. In this last installment your Lenten discipline will be to see God in all things.

What does it mean to see God in all things? I'm sure you know many similarity jokes:

- How are duct tape and God alike? Both hold the world together.
- How are lemons and kisses alike? Both have pucker power.
- Why are men like noodles? They are both in hot water!

These jokes hinge on unexpected similarities, but there are other unexpected similarities that are not intended to be funny

- How are the sun and clouds alike? Both paint the sunset with glory.
- How are the Old Testament and the New Testament alike? Both are the word of God.
- How are cigarette butts on the sidewalk and 9/11 alike? Both break the heart of God.
- How are Church and your dinner table alike? Both are the scene of a sacred meal.
- How are you and I alike? We are both made in the image of God.
- How are you and the meth addict on Chihuahua Hill alike? God loves you both equally.

Here are some that need some explanation. How are the Hebrew and Arabic words for God alike? Both echo breathing. "Yahweh" is like inhalation and exhalation. "Allah" pronounced properly is, "All'H." Both of these names for God are the first word we speak when we are born, and the last word we speak as we die.

How are Thomas Merton and a Hindu woman alike? The dot on the forehead of a Hindu woman is intended to indicate the third eye, not like the dualistic two eyes, the one that sees all to be one. Thomas Merton was perhaps the most well-known Christian mystic of the 20th century. Two weeks ago I read you his story of his eye being opened up to the unity of all things.

Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone was a 13th century dandy. He wanted to be a soldier, but he really wasn't any good at it. He wanted to be a courtier, but he was wounded and disgraced in his first battle. One day he met some lepers, and the man was never the same. What he discovered was that God was as present in the lepers as in the Church. In fact, God was to be encountered in all things. Therefore, God was to be honored in all people.

He took a look at the society in which he lived and he realized that society did not honor God's presence in all people. There were two sets of currency. One was stable and unfluctuating, the other was unstable and could devalue at any time. The rich made money in the stable currency but paid their poor servants in the unstable one. So Giovanni swore off money.

The rich could have anything they wanted. Everything from the finest wines to the local judges could be bought so Giovanni swore off riches.

The Churches were full of people who heard the word of God preached but did not follow it, so Giovanni decided to preach in another way. He would treat all as children of God equal or greater than himself. That, for him, would be preaching. We know the man as St. Francis of Assisi.

Ignacio de Loyola lived about 300 years after Francis. He was the son of a minor noble in the north of Spain. He also wanted to be a soldier, but he was seriously wounded early on in his career. During his convalescence, for the lack of anything else, he read The Life of Christ, by Ludolph of Saxony. It convinced him to give up his military and courtly ambitions and serve Christ. A vision of the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus led him to a cave outside Manresa, Spain. There he began to watch his own inner being as he struggled to pray. He discovered that the voice of God could be heard deep within. God was in him, and God was in every other person. In fact, God was to be found in all things.

He began noting the things within that encouraged his sense of the presence of God. These he called Consolation. What did not encourage the sense of God's nearness he called Desolation. He worked out ways to enhance the experience of consolation, and to

learn wisdom and compassion from his experiences of desolation. He wrote it all down and helped his friends to go through what he called the Spiritual Exercises. They, too, learned to see God in all things. Together with these friends Ignatius began to spread the word, to take the wisdom of this spiritual path into the whole church. We know them today as Jesuits.

One more similarity joke: How are creation and the Church alike? God is to be met in both.

What does it mean to see God in all things? St. Francis wanted to go to "the infidels to preach the Gospel." Seen from the point of view of preaching words to people to get them to change how they believed Francis was an unqualified failure, but there is a tantalizing story about a trip he took to Jerusalem. He wanted to see the Sultan to preach to him. Somehow he won an audience. Somehow he got home again with his neck intact. There is a telltale enigmatic reference by one of the Sultan's ministers who wrote later, "The Sultan welcomed a holy man." The saying is attributed to Francis, "Preach, preach, wherever you go, and when all else fails, use words."

Mary, in today's Gospel, was preaching Franciscan style. She loved Jesus, and so she offers in action what her heart feels. Judas takes offense. "This is bad theology. This perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor! This is a waste, bad stewardship." (Not that he had any care for the poor, he was a thief and used to dip into the common purse. His own preaching had no effect on him.) Mary, on the other hand, does what her heart knows.

Our heart knows that all is one, that all people are equally loved by God, that though we often do not treat people equally, God still loves us equally, and that "equal love" is nothing less than total, complete, unconditional and limitless selfless love. Salvation is not meant to be the result of an inner, personal, individual change of doctrines about God. It doesn't happen, as Richard Rohr says, "in the top three inches of our bodies." It happens between us, as we learn to treat one another like the image of God we are. It happens as we learn to treat one another as our heart knows best. Orthodoxy, it turns out, is really orthopraxy. Right belief, it turns out, is right action.

To live from a place of seeing God in all people is to proclaim to the world a different way of being, another way of engaging reality. This way of being is one rooted in the unitive mind rather than the dualistic one, able to make distinctions when necessary for health, and at the same time all rooted in an unconditional love. This only happens when we see the world through God's eyes.

One wonders how the eye of the Creator might see creation. Theologians since the very earliest days have attested that we can come to know the heart of God by looking at creation. The most obvious Scriptural reference to this is Paul's discussion in Romans, Chapter 1. Now Quantum Physics is cracking open wild and unexpected horizons on how the world works at its very depth. What we find is that the world is not made up of discrete pieces of matter impacted by discrete forces of energy. It all seems to be hovering in an impossibly intricate spider-web of relationships where matter and energy are interchangeable. Even the scientist who is measuring the experiment is part of the system so that the act of measuring affects the results.

I believe from Scripture and now science, that God does not see the world through the eyes of the great, cosmic and perfect Ego. No, God sees the world through the eyes of love: "Image of God, Image of God, Image of God," all as the image of God lived together in loving unity.

Next week we begin Holy Week. Holy Week is the drama of the struggle between the dualistic mind and the unitive mind. Watch as we go through it. You will see that those who condemn Jesus do so for dualistic reasons and Jesus' responses all come from a unitive mind.

We are called Christians, those who follow the Christ to the cross and beyond, through dualistic categories to true humility, compassion and love. In other words, we follow Christ into the Mystery at the heart of existence.