

Inscape July 2017

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May you always be consciously aware of the Grace and Peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love and Mercy of God the Father, and Communion with the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

LOVING THE CHRIST IN YOU

We see our lives are moving beyond youth which we always thought would be there, as spring seemed to be always there just a short while ago! We are entering into summer and then into the fall of our lives and rapidly perhaps even into the cold, wintery time of life.

It is then that we need to find our strength in Another. No longer can we find our identity by what we have accomplished. We need to find our true self in God's Word (Logos), Jesus Christ, according to whose likeness we are always being created. If we are to find true happiness and joy by living in loving communities by love received from others and love given to others, we must know our beautiful selves in the one Source of all Beauty, God as manifested by the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

This topic of *Loving the Christ in You* has been chosen for our July 2017 *Inscape* (and upcoming months) in order that we can discover the true basis of our inner beauty which will last forever and go on increasing from "Glory to Glory" as we freely learn then to love the same Christ in each other. The Kingdom of Heaven will be that continued process in which we discover all things, starting with ourselves, in Christ and Christ in all things. If we could consistently experience our beautiful self in Christ at each moment, we would be already in Heaven.

One of the saddest things about Christianity is that God loves us with His perfect and eternal love, with the full passion as revealed by Jesus Christ and His Spirit, and, yet, we continue not to love each other. The reason we do not love others is that we really do not love ourselves. Yet the second commandment of Jesus is that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. "You shall not bear any enmity against the children of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18). "Honor your father and your mother; and, Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 19:19). Perhaps it would better be said that we hate others as we hate ourselves.

And just why don't we truly love ourselves? The answer is simple enough! We do not know our true self that is constantly and freely being created with our cooperation in our oneness with Jesus Christ. We have been destined by God to be made "according to the image and likeness" (Genesis 1:26) that is Jesus Christ. This is an on-going relationship revealed to us by the Holy Spirit of our oneness in Jesus Christ.

When we live in our "false-self" we know only loneliness, depressing sorrow and isolation. God has made us for love, to love and to be loved. He who is love by nature (1 John 4:8) has implanted hunger and thirst deep within all of us, and the burning desires to leave our isolated selves and stretch out with the fullness of our being to say "yes" to God and other human beings. Distances and barriers of body and soul through sin and separation can keep us isolated from our deeper true self. We withdraw from loving encounters, afraid to reach out toward new life, new richness through love.

Have you ever been alone with yourself, away from crowds and distractions, and felt in that moment a disgust for how unfulfilled you were as a human being? And yet there was a craving deep down within you to come alive before it was too late? I believe that is where death has its

greatest sting. We know we were made for so much more. Now it looks as though our opportunities for growth and maturity and fulfillment in this life are closing in upon us.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Have you ever thought “what does it mean” to have Christ at the core of your being? To live in the state of Christ-consciousness? First of all, it means to know that we were made in the image of God and are temples of the Holy Spirit. We must also realize, however, that we have lived our lives for the most part as if we were anything but God’s. We spend our lives building up and supporting an ego that creates its own world and then suffers guilt because it has usurped the role of God. The ego creates without true love, lives in the prison of self-consciousness, then fears that if it dies, we will die with it. The writings in this, and the next months of *Inscape* are about the great mistake of believing our *ego is us*.

To live in Christ-consciousness is to be aware that divinity is our inheritance. The death of who we thought we were begins the life of who we really are. Distinguishing our “false self” from our “true self”, the Christ-in-us, is the main purpose of our life on earth. Through self-emptying love we are reborn into a life that unifies us with all mankind as its history unfolds the eternal plan of God.

Both True Christian faith and worship (Orthodoxia) and True Christian practice (Orthopraxis) are part of that unfolding. But no mere study of another’s words can effect a radical transformation of our lives. “Pray without ceasing,” Jesus told us. By loving the Christ in you, it will make your whole existence a prayer, so that you can become continuously aware of the Christ who lives in you, the Christ in whom we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28).

Our Christian vision of reality begins with a view of our brokenness and alienation from God, from our true selves, from other human beings, and from nature. God’s creation of us as a divine image and likeness (Genesis 1:26) placed us above all other creatures and in harmony with them. Our selfish ego disrupted that harmony, blaming others for self-caused pain, mistaking the effect for the cause, forgetting that devils as well as divinity are within us. But despite our attempts to hide in our darkness and ignorance, God’s great love went on shining upon creation like the sun, giving warmth and light. Getting rid of the ego...is only the beginning.

God came among us in the person of Jesus Christ, through whom the Spirit poured living waters that flood the whole cosmos. God’s forgiveness and merciful love for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus release divine, uncreated, loving energies from God and from all that God made for us. The name of Christ, the Logos that sang the creation of the world, is in our mouths, giving us birth all over again, this time in the Holy Spirit. Our new Eden is the whole universe; our new law is love that never fails and never ends.

The love of God, which holds the universe together, is for Christians a collective vision. Acceptance of the vision in everyday living of our lives we call faith.

Let us follow through history the growth of faith in our vision of God as love, seeing how it accords with our personal development as spiritual beings, seeing with new eyes, hearing with new ears, the single word that brought forth the universe (from non-existence into being) and all that is in it. We will understand that the development of faith rises in a spiral, recapitulating all the levels that preceded the present one. The history of God’s interaction with human time and God’s transformation of our lives are two sides of the same coin. We realize this in our own experience that we know the truth (the Person of Jesus Christ) not only through reason, but also through our heart. We know both through the collective journey of the race in time and through our personal experience of trust in God.

OUR SPIRITUAL HISTORY

Our spiritual history, after the dead-end of Eden, was opened when Abraham was called to leave ancient Sumer in search of the Promised Land, the promised state of interior wholeness. He left the infancy of the spiritual primitive, who remains unconscious of personal identity, responsibility, and transfiguration, and headed west toward the sunset, toward the eventual full maturity of the human race. God had promised Abraham that his seed would be as many as the stars. Yet God also asked him in a test of faith to offer up his only child. As Abraham's knife was in mid-air, God intervened: "And the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham! Abraham! And he said, Here am I. And he said to him, Do not lay your hand on the boy, neither shall you harm him; for now I know that you are a man who reveres God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Genesis 22:11-12).

God's plan to establish a covenant with the human race could now unfold because Abraham kept faith. At the point of Abraham's knife, at the point of his obedience, **we** ourselves began our spiritual evolution. **We** would be Abraham's seed, and like Abraham **we** would be channels through which the world would be blessed and transformed.

As Moses led the descendants of Abraham out of captivity in Egypt, they experienced God's love in the emptiness of the desert, knowing God as tender and compassionate "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord, The God merciful and compassionate, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). They were children of a family, and like us as children, lived by the rules of a tribe, rarely conscious of personal, private life. Yet the implications of a personal God gave the Hebrews the beginnings of self-knowledge, foreign to the experience of anonymous neighboring masses caught up in primitive nature worship. What is important about this stage in the spiritual evolution of the race is that the "thou shall" of the Ten Commandments makes the human person morally responsible to God and to the community (neighbors).

The adolescence of the Jewish people took place in Babylon, still a symbol for decadence and sexual sin, the place where the individual must come of age without the old tribal supports of childhood. As youths coming into puberty are disturbed by changes in body and mind and leave the parental rule to seek their own identity, so the Jewish people, having lost temple and homeland and living among pagan strangers, were forced to develop an identity beyond that of the tribe and its laws. The prophet Jeremiah called his exiled people to a circumcision of the heart, to return love for love: "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings" (Jeremiah 4:4). Jeremiah asked the people to confront themselves honestly, to repent of their sins, and to change their way of life so they could experience the forgiving love of God. "For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a good hope at the end. Then when you shall seek me with all your heart, you shall find me, says the Lord. And I will bring back your exiles, and I will gather you from all the nations and from all the lands where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I caused you to be carried away captive" (Jeremiah 29:11-14).

The cry from the prophets is: Be converted. Turn to Yahweh in a decision of your heart. Not sacrifice, but obedience is what the Lord would have (1 Samuel 15:22; Amos 5:21-24; Hosea 6:6; Isaiah 1:1-11; Jeremiah 7:21-23). Individual responsibility is part of a drawing I-Thou relationship between God and the individual. God knows and loves each of His human creations as a "person" who cannot be portrayed, replaced or even represented by any other person. Each child of God is unique within the Body of Christ. God knows what each of us needs, before we ask or are even aware of it (vesper Prayers of Light).

The static security of the tribal existence as an end in itself was cracking. Instead of the Old Covenant, written on tablets of stone, God was calling the Jewish people to a New Covenant written on the hearts of individuals. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law in the midst of them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his brother and every man his neighbor, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall **all** know me, from the youngest to the eldest of them says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

The Jewish people were no longer children, but mature, responsible adults. The human person had begun to emerge.

What happened to the Jewish people in the Exile happens to all of us as we grow toward physical, psychological, and spiritual maturity. We become adolescents and break away from old authorities in order to find ourselves as free, morally responsible individuals. In the process, however, we lose the sense of oneness with the world around us that made infancy and childhood so joyful. Alone, no longer a “we,” I seek the “I” of others, the “I” of God. But my own “I” has swollen to such a size that I can no longer see around it.

I have moved from external authority into myself, discovering a new authority and power—my own separate ego. Like the Jews in exile and the confused adolescent, now that I have found myself, I must struggle in my isolation to find God. Former communal services, rituals, pious practices, and even personal prayer seem to be obsolete, meaningless. The human being at this stage is struggling to say “I” to God and yet cannot quite hear God’s “Thou.”

If we, along with the Jewish people in exile, remained only on the *I*-level of autonomy, we would never grow. We would never unite with the human family, but would remain separated egos. The coming of Christ allowed us to move beyond the egotistical level of consciousness, in which we are “chosen people,” and unto full humanity.

Jesus Christ leads us into a mature, creative freedom, unhindered by the limitations of infantile demands, egotism, or human laws designed to subject the individual to the tribe.

We are drawn into the I-Thou bond with God and with the whole body of creation, beyond distinctions of Jew or Gentile, servant or free, male or female (Galatians 3:28). This new level of consciousness is rooted in the *other* that brings forth the *we* in mutual self-giving, not only to each other but to us all, “for we are members of his Body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (Ephesians 5:30).

Jesus did not come to destroy the Jewish faith but to fulfill it. He not only spoke of the Father, as had the prophets, but was one with the Father, as Jesus promised we would be one in him, branches of the vine. Not the individual then, but the fulfilled being-in-community is the goal of the evolution of consciousness and of faith. We are now carried in the womb of the world with all our brothers and sisters, the family of God, and reborn with them.

The miracle of new life did not come about by our own effort, any more than our first birth did. Mind-expanding programs might lead us erroneously to believe that alone we can change our perception of reality, that the power to do it is within us like a fruit contained in the seed. But Christianity teaches, and history demonstrates that we cannot do it ourselves.

We have to be shown how to give ourselves away in love. We need a savior. Our proud ego must bow down in an act of trust and humility, become as little children. Unless we surrender to God, we will be stuck in our separated selves until we die.

Through faith in Jesus’ resurrection, we are raised to the full meaning of individual freedom and to unity with God’s body across the planet.

Like Abraham sacrificing his son in faith, Jesus believed so totally in God’s love that he was free to forgive the Roman soldiers who killed him, even to lay down his life for them in love, widening the faith of Abraham into a cosmic covenant, excluding no one.

Before he died, Jesus acted out in ritual form the covenant that began at Mamre when Abraham offered his sacrifice, completely surrendering to God. In the night before Jesus died, he shared himself as real food and drink with his friends. In prefiguring his death on the cross the next day: "And when it was time, Jesus came and sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said to them, I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; For I say to you henceforth I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. And he took the cup and gave thanks and said, Take this and divide it among yourselves. For I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes. And he took bread and gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them and said, This **IS** my body, which is given for your sake; do this in remembrance of me. And likewise also he took the cup, after they had eaten supper, and he said, This **IS** the cup of the new covenant in my blood which is shed for you" (Luke 22:14-20). Dying on the cross was God's ultimate intervention in human history. In that act God's self-giving in love (kenosis) to mankind, to the whole universe, was total.

A new level of consciousness opens to those who accept the risen Christ as present within them through the Holy Spirit. Christ is and always will be among us! Saint Paul described the new I-Thou level of consciousness in these words: "Whoever from now on is a follower of Christ is a new creation; old things have passed away; And all things have become new through God who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; For God was in Christ, who has reconciled the world with his majesty, NOT counting their sins against them; and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we beseech you for Christ, be reconciled to God. For he who did not know sin, for your sakes made himself sin, that we may through him be made the righteous of God" (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). "I am crucified with Christ; henceforth it is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life which now I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

We have become the chalice of the world, empty to the Spirit, who re-creates the cosmos by filling us with Spirit. When the Holy Spirit (at Pentecost) filled all that was lacking in the disciples, they shifted to a higher level of consciousness than when they were under the law.

Jesus, living within his disciples, released his Spirit, who shaped them into members capable of love and self-sacrifice for their one Body. "Now the congregation of the believers were of one soul and of one mind; not one of them spoke of the property he possessed as his own; but everything they had was in common" (Acts 4:32).

Without the example and presence of the risen Christ, we would remain lonely individuals, trying to raise ourselves by a bootstrap operation to a new arc of the evolutionary spiral, something that 5,000 years of human history have not been able to do. We now carry within us the Teacher of teachers, the Physician of physicians, the Lord of lords, the King of kings, and need no guru to control us from outside. Christians, whose living guide is within them, are free individuals, under the domination of no human being.

Our freedom is the responsibility, laid on us by love, to put aside our false self in order to live in Christ, our true self, in whom we love and serve all human beings, for they wear Christ's face. "Now the Lord is that very Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (freedom). But we all, with open faces (unveiled), see as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and we shall be transformed into the same likeness, from one glory to another, just as the Spirit comes from the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). Through the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we are transformed into the image that we reflect!

Every breath we breathe is now a prayer; we live in the burning bush and breathe fire. Together, as the community and assembly (ecclesia) (church), those who are called, those who are invited, those who surround the Eucharistic Table, we approach the altar of God, who

is the consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), with childlike hope that all the sins of our past will be burned and that God's life will rise in us like spring sap in a tree.

Around this Communion table this family gathers for Divine Liturgy and opens its mouth to be fed. In the partaking of Jesus Christ into us (I am the Bread of Life which came down from heaven), we receive the perfection and totality of the Divine and human natures in his person. We become the living flesh and blood of the earth; we become rocks, rivers, inseparable from each other and from the world into which we are woven. We are healed not only in our own minds, but in the "whole body" relationships of body, soul and spirit in the family of God. Their flesh, their blood is ours; we have received them in receiving God, just as we love God in loving them. As God feeds us with Christ, so we feed God to the World.

"Hear us, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, from the height of Your holy dwelling place and from the throne of the glory of Your Kingdom, and come and sanctify us, You Who are seated on high with the Father, and who are invisibly present here among us, and deem it proper to impart to us with Your mighty hand, Your spotless Body and Precious Blood, and through us, to ALL your people." (Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom)

In our Communion we draw the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory of the Cosmic Christ into the heart of matter "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31) even as he is evolving the universe into His Body. "I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, says the Lord God Who *is* and Who *was* and Who *is to come*, the Almighty [Pantokrator]" (Revelations 1:8).

Into the time-less, space-less Trinitarian Community of Love, we carry our bit of earth, the clay from which we were formed, shaped by the Potter into a vessel fit for living water, fit for fire and light.

What we are, what we have become, and what we will be in the unending future-less future, is very good in the sight of God. No matter how broken we might be, one thing is for sure, God's covenant: that even as we are, God loves us with an unconditional love. All of his creation is loved with an everlasting love and God's affection for us is constant "The Lord has appeared to me from afar, saying, Yea, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn you" (Jeremiah 31:3).

By such love, our broken fragments are gathered together and transformed into a whole, an integrated community of merciful love of which God is the Source. By trust we are both healed and opened to love at a single stroke. **NOT** by our brains or our wills or even our good behavior... "And he has quickened you also who were dead because of your sins and trespasses; In which you previously walked according to the course of this world, and according to the will of the supreme ruler of the air, the spirit which is active in the children of disobedience. In whose very deeds in which we were also corrupted from the very beginning through the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the wills of the flesh and of the mind, thereby we became completely the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he has loved us. Even when we were dead in our sins, has made us live together with Christ, by whose grace we are saved; And he has raised us up with him, and seated us with him in heaven, through Jesus Christ. In the age to come he might show the exceedingly riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Jesus Christ. For it is by grace that you are saved through faith; **NOT** of your doing; it is the gift of God; **NOT** of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his creation, created through Jesus Christ ultimately for good works, and God has before ordained that we should live in them" (Ephesians 2:1-10)...do we come alive in God, but by a conscious letting go of all we once thought or wished we were. Having struggled to become grown, self-sufficient men and women, we must come full circle to become newborn children again, in order to complete our destiny (theosis, divinization), to

become at once wise and innocent. In the sacred, transformative ritual of Holy Communion within the Eucharistic Community, we are fed like babies at the breast of God. Brothers and sisters together in one Body, one Mind, one Heart, one Will, we are transformed into the Christ of the manger, the Christ of the cross, the Christ of the resurrection, the Christ of the descent into Hades, the Christ of the empty tomb. Into every cell and tissue and organ of our body's dust flows the Life of God, his Uncreated Energies of Love.

The work of the Spirit is to join and unite us with God and neighbor, to give us a common consciousness with the whole of creation. That is the Good News Jesus told us to tell the world by our love, by our lives. It is truly our labors, our efforts in total freedom, and the grace of God that bind our will with God's Holy Will. In this synergy we help build the Body of Christ, we help expand the Kingdom of God to include all of Creation. What we do during our lives echoes throughout the whole universe; we ourselves are the song and harmony of God.

Our world is charged with the grandeur of God. God's loving energies beat and pulsate inside each atom, each molecule, each sub-atomic particle and wave, saturating the universe, nourishing it in one holy continuous Communion and Thanksgiving. In this transfigured world we walk God-like, as loved children "We therefore Godlike, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and has given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet savour" (Ephesians 5:1-2). God's love surrounds and encloses us like the air we breathe.

With the many sufferings and the strenuous efforts in the face of the difficulties in life, it often hurts to be alive, to be in a physical body. At first we fight painfully to breathe into our flesh and bones the Spirit of God, as the newborn struggles for air. But we were made in the image and likeness of God to be a soul married to flesh. If we through away our body, where are we going to live? And so we begin to take care of our own incarnation, passing through our daily life with great respect, for God is in us. We are the children of God, heirs of the Kingdom, and temples of the Holy Spirit. Nothing is more extraordinary, more sacred and holy (because God is Sacred and Holy), than this small miracle, our lives.

Coming home to God, coming full circle, we find ourselves on familiar ground—the core of our own consciousness. We are where we belong, where we always were, only now our eyes are wide open, and here in our hearts we see God "WILL see God" (Matthew 5:8).

We shall not cease from exploration,
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
(T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*)

Truly we shall not cease from exploring. Next month's *Inscape* will be shrouded in the mystery of the "Human Person", the Divine Image (Icon).

Prayerfully yours in Christ Jesus our Lord,
Father John Michael Zboyovski