

***Inscape* September 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!

IN GOD THERE IS NO DARKNESS

Have you ever wondered what our present world would now be like if God had *NOT* so loved this world as to have given us his Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16)? All too often we miss the purpose of the enfleshment among us of God's divine Word. We believe God's Word in Jesus Christ came among us to die on the cross and in some legalistic, mechanical way we are automatically "saved."

Jesus Christ is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6) that leads us out of darkness into light and makes it possible for us to become children of God, all who believe in the name of him who was born of God (John 1:12-13). The mission of Jesus is not only to reveal to us that the Trinity of a loving Father, Son, and Spirit is at the heart of all reality. He also makes it possible through the release of his Spirit for us to grow in the experience of the indwelling Trinity. We can know with absolute certitude that God loves us in Jesus through his Spirit. The sin and death experienced by our false ego can be conquered by our intimate experience of God's love for us. Guilt, fears, and anxieties can be totally eradicated from our hearts and we can live a new life in Christ.

The True Faith and Worship of Orthodoxy given us through the Spirit of the risen Jesus shows us that God is a community of loving persons in whom there can be no false ego. "God is love" means that by the very one nature shared by the three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each person in an ecstasy of self-giving passes beyond the limitations of an isolated self to risk self-emptying love for the other. Jesus revealed to us a Father who poured the fullness of divinity into his Son (Colossians 2:9). Not only does the Son discover his being in the Father's love, but the Father mutually discovers his being in the Son's return of love to him.

In God there can be no false ego between two divine persons bound in ecstatic love. There are no defenses, walls, or barriers put up to protect the false self. There are no attacks against the others. There is only perfect unconditional love. That love is the intimacy of self-giving and self-discovery in the self-giving. Love truly "differentiates as it unites."

Such knowledge of the Trinity would be ineffectual unless Jesus made it possible through the outpouring of his Holy Spirit that we might experience this dynamic self-giving love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit going on at all times within our very beings. Our bodies are truly temples of God since the Holy Spirit dwells within us (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19).

Our Christian faith convinces us that the ecstatic love of the Trinity explodes out through the same Spirit of love as self-emptying love toward a created world. Saint Irenaeus of the second century describes human beings as "empty receptacles" to be filled by God's goodness and loving kindness.

If God is love, God must be self-giving, for that is what love is. But if God is self-giving, God must be an involving God who wants to get closer to us, not merely by giving us material gifts of creation, but ultimately God must want to share divine personhood with us. God wishes not just to communicate ideas about divinity to us, but to be in intimate communion, ecstatic union, with each of us.

God's loving movements at all times are invading, bombarding, penetrating us at the deepest levels of our being. These are called by the early Fathers "God's uncreated energies of love." These are God as differentiated Father, Son, and Spirit, giving themselves in the unique self-gifting of Father, Son, and Spirit. Such uncreated energies are found as God counts the very hairs on our heads (Luke 12:17) and takes care of all our needs. They are found especially in God's self-giving to us person-to-person in prayer and in the Eucharist, but also when we love one another with God's very love in us that becomes perfected in our human love (1 John 4:12).

The good news that Jesus came to reveal to us and make possible through his Spirit is that the Kingdom of God, the indwelling Trinity, is truly within us. No man can serve two masters, therefore unify your inner life. Saint Isaac the Syrian instructs us: "Enter eagerly into the treasure house that is within you, and so you will see the things that are in heaven—for there is but one single entry to them both. The ladder that leads to the Kingdom is hidden within your SOUL (imagination, intellect, memory, will, understanding, emotions, and reasoning powers). Flee from sin, dive into yourself, and in your soul you will discover the stairs by which to ascend." (unpublished manuscript on Saint Isaac by Fr. George Maloney).

We can come to know and love God and are known and loved by God as God's children, as a part of God's unique and Only-Begotten Son. The doctrine of the Trinity becomes for us now a living experience of the one and united God, essentially love, and always in the same relationship to us but now manifested to us in divine energies meeting us at each moment.

Christ came as the Light into a world of darkness but the darkness did not comprehend him (John 1:4-5). More than this. The darkness in the hearts of many around him rose up and snuffed out that divine Light. He preached the "good news" that God is a loving Father of infinite mercy, forgiving and remitting all people of their sins and transgressions, bringing healing love to the lonely and desolate, hope to the hopeless, freeing all from fears and worries. This man who stood before his listeners was claiming that he was the focal point of the presence of God's dynamic power, bringing about new, life-giving relationships directly with God.

Jesus calls us to overhaul completely the habitual values by which we live when we are under darkness and guided by a self-seeking ego. Like children, we are to become totally dependent upon God's Spirit for this knowledge that is beyond our own power, infected as it is by our false ego: "And he said, Truly, truly I say to you, unless you change and become like little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever therefore will humble himself like this little child, shall be great in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 18:3-4).

We have seen the great dignity to which we have been called by God's free choice, namely, to enter into the intimacy of God's love and to become a totally new creation by God's uncreated energies working within our lives to make us regenerated children, born of the Spirit from above (John 3:3-5). We have also seen the negativities in our lives that hold us back from realizing our true selves in a growing oneness with Christ. Let us focus and be vigilant in more detail upon the false ego that sin has brought into existence. Before we can move to our true selves in Christ, it is necessary to see who we are now in our illusory selves (the false world we have created with our misdirected powers).

THE STRATEGY OF THE EGO

Our self-centeredness and pride cause us to lie to our selves in order to escape from guilt. We don't want to take responsibility for our brokenness which consists of anything that separates us from God, so we attribute all our temptations to the Devil or even to God. In doing so, we totally ignore the true nature of God and our own human nature, as Saint James clearly

teaches: "Blessed is the man who endures temptations; for when he is tested, he shall receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man; But every man is tempted by his own lust; he covets and is enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and sin when it has natured, brings forth death" (James 1:12-15).

We need instead to present ourselves to God as who we really are, shaped by heredity, education, the action and reaction of others upon us and ours upon them. Being honest with ourselves and with God means tracing our fear and guilt to their source: a false self that we created to replace the image of God. Our Christian spirituality must rest upon an understanding of the way the false ego works as well as on the power of God's indwelling love to transform this illusory self into our true self.

We are dominated more by fear than by love. We find ourselves being unloving almost universally toward those who dislike us and even from time to time toward those whom we profess to love, such as husband, wife, children, and friends. Perhaps they will know our lack of love, we reason, and cease to love us. Perhaps they will even do us harm. And so we create fear, the fear Jesus said only perfect love can cast out.

It is the state of fear from which we must be delivered, for the objects that we fear are often only in our minds. The nation's number one health problem is not bodily disease but rather emotional and mental illness. And most of these psychic disturbances are due to needless fear. Many doctors are concerned with healing the effects of fear. But if we are to attain wholeness of body, soul, and spirit, we must discover the root of fear, which is lack of trust in God's loving care for us.

As Christians we have heard from Sacred Scripture that God is loving, cares for us at all times, in all circumstances, and that we have no need to be anxious about anything. But still we generate new fears. One author describes how fear spawns new fears and such fears are passed on to others: "We are afraid we shall not succeed in business, and we create our own failures. We are afraid we shall not have the money to pay our bills for the current month and we generally lack something because we have created that lack. We fear bad luck, disaster and death, and it is a wonder that man has not swept himself off the face of the earth through his fearful creations."

The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is our story, too. We have inherited a primal fear of God that is spawned out of a primal guilt at having "offended" God as if God had the ego's capacity for spite. This guilt exists in what Jung called our collectiveness unconscious. We are tied to every sin of those who have preceded us. Being born human already preconditions us to live in fear and guilt that blocks our sharing of God's life. This primal fear that we have disobeyed God and are guilty of divine wrath and punishment promotes fear in us. We fear God whom we should in fact love. We accept a false perception of God as a vengeful, punishing Jehovah, and like Adam and Eve we want to avoid God's accusing eye.

We accept the ego's claims that we are unworthy to be loved by God or anyone else. But the ego in its pride has us deny any guilt. The guilt for all our fears and lack of love has to be projected outside upon others. We accept the principle of cause and effect, but the ego twists and reverses just who is the true cause and what is the effect.

The ego completely convinces us that we are not the cause that creates a world separate from ourselves as its effect. "If only" becomes our acceptance of the ego's persuasion that the cause of all our fears and guilt is really in someone other than ourselves. If only that other person were not so greedy. I would be more generous, we say. Like King David, embarrassed at his adultery, we squirm and refuse to hear the prophetic word being sounded in the depths of our being, "Thou art the man!"

The more we yield to the ego's strategy, the more powerful the ego becomes. Our true self becomes suffocated deep down within us. Fears and guilt mount as the false ego becomes more dominant. The gap that separates us from our true self widens into an abyss. We run further "east of Eden" (Genesis 4:16) as Cain separated himself from his family and from God after having slain his brother. Higher walls and protective barriers are built up around our ego, which attacks others or withdraws into lonely isolation.

Our deepest longing is for true love from God and neighbor. Yet the enemy that prevents it lies within us. Our ego holds the key to the door that would allow us to pass humbly and gently out into the loving arms of God and others. And so day after day, year after year, we remain locked into the illusory self that creates illusory, separated worlds of enemies outside of us.

Our self-centeredness resorts to aggression and attack to retain the world it has created, a world that says we can exist independently of all others. In the words of the lawyer in Albert Camus's *The Fall*, we can say to ourselves: "Fortunately I arrived! I am the end and the beginning; I announce the law. In short, I am a judge-penitent.... Ah, *mon, ami*, do you know what the solitary creature is like as he wanders in big cities."

Is there a way out? Can no one come to our rescue? Are we destined to remain locked forever inside, tormented by the false ego? Such a need expressed from the depths of our heart becomes like a ray of light shining through the cracked wall of our inner prison. It can lead us out if only we want to leave through the veil of the temple, ripped open by the self-sacrifice of Christ on the Holy, Precious and Life-Giving Cross."

PLEASE HEAR WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

Don't be fooled by me.
 Don't be fooled by the face I wear.
 For I wear a thousand masks, masks that I'm afraid to take off.
 And none of them me.
 Pretending is an art that's second nature with me, but don't be fooled.
 For God's sake, don't be fooled.

Only you can call me into aliveness.
 Each time you're kind, and gentle, and encouraging.
 Each time you try to understand because you really care,
 My heart begins to grow
 Very small wings, very feeble wings, but wings.
 With your sensitivity and sympathy, and your power of understanding.
 You can breathe life into me.
 I want you to know that.
 I want you to know how important you are to me.
 How you can be the creator of the person that is me,
 If you choose to. Please choose to.

You alone can break down the wall behind which I tremble.
 You alone can remove my mask.
 You alone can release me from my shadow-world of panic and uncertainty,
 From my lonely person.
 Do not pass me by. Please....do not pass me by.
 Who am I, you may wonder. I am someone you know very well.
 For I am every man you meet, and I am every woman you meet. —Anonymous

TURNING AROUND

From Father Henri Nouwen as he wrote in his diary: “If we don’t love one another we kill one another. There is no middle road.”

As there is no middle road between love and death, there is none between life in light and life in darkness. Our true self, surrendered to God’s holy will, lives in the light of God’s love, while the false self, hanging on our own will like a bat in a cave, lives in darkness. From the pain and loss we all go through as we grow up, we learn that hatred hurts and love heals. Hatred separates us so that we can hurt each other without seeing that we hurt ourselves. Love puts us in the other person’s skin; we do not hurt others because they are us. In knowing myself through you, in choosing to love you as myself, I am surprised by happiness.

Since we human beings can love by choice and in that love transcend our small selves, we are *responsible* in a way that no other creatures on the face of the earth are responsible for what they do. Your dog thinks you’re God, whether you’re good or bad, and serves you, even killing at your word. But we are not imprisoned by such conditioning. We can think and will, having a mind that knows God is Absolute Meaning, and a desire that wants to stretch the body, mind, and spirit until they touch that meaning.

The call to repentance (*metanoia*), this returning to our true self, is also a turning to God against whose perfect goodness we see our broken souls. We must begin our inward-turning with an honest look at our existential place in time, our being-in-the world as “thrown,” as inauthentic, broken, and incomplete, not responding to God’s love because we don’t want to. There it is! We would rather not know the love of God or know who we really are. We would rather watch a football game, or eat a pizza, or read the stock market report, or busy ourselves with all kind of meaningless activity and search for senseless knowledge than know who we are. God calls us and we cover and close our ears: “Listen, you heavens; earth attend, for Yahweh is speaking, ‘I reared sons, I brought them up, but you have rebelled against me...A sinful nation, a people weighed down with guilt, a breed of wrong-doers, perverted sons. They have abandoned Yahweh, despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from him.... Come now, let us talk this over, says Yahweh. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. **IF** you are willing to obey, you shall eat the good things of the earth. But **IF** you persist in rebellion, the sword shall eat you instead.’ The mouth of Yahweh has spoken” (Isaiah 1:2-4, 18-20).

We are God’s people, the sheep of God’s pasture, and we know God’s voice, even when it breaks our hearts, convicts us of self-worship, tells us to fall on our knees.

“But now, now—it is Yahweh who speaks—come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning. Let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn, turn to Yahweh your God again, for he is all tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in graciousness, and ready to relent” (Joel 2:12-13).

God forgives us. That is the Good News. God puts himself in our hands, becoming the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). Here I am, God says. Here we are. Will you come little children? Will you turn around? God says to us what Jesus said to the daughters of Jerusalem, and never stops saying it. God says we have reason to weep. “The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is close at hand” (Mark 1:15). Turn around, the Good News is in front of us. We only have to take the “free will” next step.

Where we were not, where only a false self jumped up and down like a demented marionette, there we suddenly are, ready for life, not death, eating the Bread of Life, promise-crammed with immortality. The grace of God falls upon the hard desert sand of our hearts, stirring the seeds planted there. We do not have to hide behind masks or compete for the non-

existent room at the top. We do not have to be separated from others out of fear they will attack us. We can shed our dead skin and be ourselves, giving up our false shell to become the butterflies we were meant to be.

When Jesus called us to share his eternal life, we responded according to our own ideas of what we wanted to hear. When they heard his words, the Romans washed their hands of him; the Zealots expected their messiah to overthrow the occupying Roman army. They were not prepared to turn away from violence to follow him whose only violence was against his own human weakness. The Good News that Jesus preached was that God is a loving and forgiving Father. God heals the sick, the suffering, the lonely, the desolate and the brokenhearted bringing hope to the hopeless. To turn around and see God's face is not to be afraid, for as one experiences God's perfect and eternal love, all fear is casted out.

We cannot save ourselves, and we cannot go on living as if Christ had not told us we had to turn around and look him in the face (Ephesians 2:8-10). Our lives are no longer our own. But now we know what we are, and how much we need a savior to heal us:

"In particular, I want to urge you in the name of the Lord, not to go on living the aimless kind of life that pagans live. Intellectually they are in the dark, and they are estranged from the life of God, without knowledge because they have shut their hearts to it. Their sense of right and wrong once dulled, they have abandoned themselves to sexuality and eagerly pursue a career of indecency of every kind. Now that is hardly the way you have learnt from Christ, unless you failed to hear him properly when you were taught what the truth is in Jesus. You must give up your old way of life; you must put aside your old self, which gets corrupted by following illusory desires. Your mind must be renewed by a spiritual revolution so that you can put on the new self that has been created in God's way, in the goodness and holiness of the truth" (Ephesians 4:17-24).

When we look at what we are and what Christ is, our hearts break, we rend our garments. Any moment may bring us face to face with Christ—a serious illness that forces us to a long, lonely convalescence, a retreat, the death of a loved one, or economic ruin. Our false ego needs to be jolted out of its smug self-sufficiency. Either we drug ourselves like alcoholics into thinking that nothing is wrong with us or con ourselves into thinking we can take care of our problem alone. "If we say we have no sin in us, we are deceiving ourselves and refusing to admit the truth; but if we acknowledge our sins, then God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and purify us from all our unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-10).

The Pharisee in the parable of Jesus stood before God in the front of the synagogue and found nothing wrong with himself of his conduct: "I thank you God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week, I pay tithes on all I get." The tax collector, however, was truly repentant as he cast his eyes downward within himself in his broken state and beat his breast, saying: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." The acknowledged sinner, the publican, went home justified before God. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14).

Our greatest strength, as Mary Magdalene, the Penitent thief, and Saint Paul understood, is in our weakness. "So I shall be very happy to make my weakness my special boast so that the power of Christ may stay over me, and that is why I am quite content with my weakness, and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and the agonies I go through for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Before we can turn around, we have to look at our false face in the mirror and decide we don't want to be false anymore. But first we have to see how false we were, looking hard at ourselves in the light of what Christ is. Our weakness reminds us that we cannot save ourselves.

In our helpless weakness, we at last let go of our willfulness. At the moment of childlike trust, the risen, living Jesus Christ releases within our depths his Holy Spirit of love. We become uniquely and beautifully ourselves, set free from all fears and inner darkness by willing to live as the image of God.

As we decide to accept our ego's sinfulness and dereliction, we see we have been exiles in a foreign land. Our very broken condition is our means to rise and go back home to our heavenly Father.

Before the penitent Saint Mary Magdalene could stand at the foot of the cross with Jesus or meet him after he was risen, seven devils had first to be driven out of her. She did not have "innocence" to offer him, only a broken life and a broken heart. She became a "whole integrated person" and "holy person", not in spite of her sinful past, but precisely in and through that brokenness that taught her to love much.

The parable Jesus told about the prodigal son's return to his father illustrates how a fault can become a healing medicine. The virtuous elder son had never left the home of the father and consequently had never learned how much his father loved him. Our brokenness teaches us that we need God. No longer do we have to run away from God; we run *to* God.

We need more than a mere desire to return home to our Father. We must remember, repent, and then return. Our acceptance of the sin and brokenness of our past and our turning toward God will not bring us permanently from darkness to light unless we courageously tear up our false self, moment by moment, as it tries to plant its roots back in our heart's soil:

"If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:34; Matthew 10:38; 16-24; Luke 9:23; 14:27).

Our new life in Christ must be backed up with denial of our false self, in every thought, word, and deed. Like the grain of wheat in the parable, we must be willing to die so that we may live and multiply more than a hundred fold.

Not only must we deny our false self but we must positively put on Christ, ready to endure whatever suffering might come as we obey his word speaking within us. Christ does not ask us merely to suffer. He knows the false ego does not die without violence. A lifetime of selfish habits, rooted in fear and guilt, does not die easily. It requires no less than a crucifixion. Are we ready to be converted to the Lord, to turn our faces to his face? Our cry is, "Come, Lord Jesus. Maranatha." Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

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