

Inscape August 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!

HUMAN PERSON—DIVINE ICON

Before growing up to think and to suffer consequent separation from nature, early human beings lived in an Eden of perpetual childhood. They saw in dreams and spoke in poetry. Genesis pictures the first human beings walking through a garden world like happy children, celebrating each day as though it were their first. All nature was an extension of themselves and they lived in the world like unborn children in the womb. At the same time, they mothered and fathered the life growing around them, they were mothered and fathered by the God they knew as intimately as they knew themselves.

Human beings were created as mystics and contemplatives, at home in heaven and on earth, drawing no line between the two. They took in the unified field of nature and spirit in one visionary glance and drank water from the well of that Absolute Being we now call God. Adam and Jesus called this Being “Abba,” “Daddy,” for they knew God as God was, not as the stranger, our thinking, self-centered brains have created. Because they did not separate themselves from God or God from the world, these first human beings looked at creation and agreed with God that it was very good. After the joyful harvest of their days, they danced, then slept and danced again, to the endless music of their dreams.

A poem written in Sanskrit five thousand years ago recalls to us anxious and worried modern men and women that joyful child-self we have locked up deep in the labyrinth of our unconscious. In embryonic form, that little child beckons us grown-up human beings into a newness of life possible only if we were to let these powers unfold from within us:

See yourself bestowing your goodness and warmth to all.
 Pour out your strength and calm.
 Call upon the forces of good to pervade all things.
 Reach out beyond knowing and embrace oneness.
 Healing as you go, breathe the living word restoring creation.
 Share the spiritual fire and let the mystic light of God fill you to overflowing.
 Ultimately there is only one truth, one pure blessed reality:
 That the power of love will pervade and overcome all things.
 We will rest in utter completion of wonder.
 We are not alone, but we are within the same mystical unfolding.
 Happy are we only in as far as kindness and vision live within shining outward.
 Words are shadows; acts are born of real caring and loving.
 A truth in stillness do we share in the moments beyond time,
 Fleeting touches of an ultimate total embrace.
 Within these things lies the most sacred and simple mystery of all:
 We are loved, utterly and completely.

Such a being it was that Jesus took on his lap and held in his arms, saying, “Unless YOU become as little children, you WILL NOT enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

After childhood, we became fragmented and separated from each other. We began to believe that God and the reality outside us exist only in relation to ourselves, to be measured only by our small rule. We came to consider ourselves the center of our cosmos. Building on sand, we have lost touch with God, the Ground of our being, the Source, the Beginning and the End. Beneath the sandy foundation of the constructed life of our own doings, we eventually can discover that there must be “rock,” the true cornerstone from which all other stones will be set in relationship.

All things belong to God, but we have taken them as ours, raping nature, taking it by force as something to be possessed and used for our own selfish purposes. We judge the conduct of others as though we were God and refuse to find any fault in our own. We violently attack others and project onto them the source of all our problems: our own desire to take the place of God.

Our technological control over nature has unleashed our demon into the world around us, and we live in fear of the fallout from our own bombs. Fear dominates us and makes us fight the wrong enemy. We have not yet understood that the enemy whom we confront is us.

Is it not strange that the wealthiest countries are led by fear and not by generous love? Driven by our insecurities to accumulate more and more goods and to enjoy more creature comforts, we live in fear that we will lose what we have to thieves, terrorists, taxes, or inflation. As one wit has said of our time, “Too much ain’t enough.” Some restaurants with signs stating “come, we have all you can eat” are upstaged by restaurants with signs stating “come, we have more than all you can eat.”

Toxic water and air sting the nose and rot the lungs; public mineral resources are being handed over to the wealthy, impoverishing the rest of mankind. Fumes from our machines rise up to cloud the atmosphere with a gaseous shroud that may eventually choke the planet and its vegetation, animal, and human life on earth. The super-wealthy are actually planning to colonize other planets to conquer and control, because the earth cannot give them what they desire. Noble mankind, created by God Who offers the gift of love and eternal life with Him, to be little less than a god (Psalms 8:5), becomes a quintessence of dust as we build up bigger walls to separate ourselves from others. There are enemies and terrorists who are out to kill and destroy us, and they openly admit their plans to the world. “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but who cannot kill the soul; but above all, be afraid of him who can destroy both the soul and the body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). But the real enemy, however, is that false self who gnaws at our insides until we are empty shells.

And we continue to put on masks and play roles before each other, hollow persons who speak in hollow voices stuffed with the straw of ego, our bones too dry to live. Anxieties, worries and fears increase as we continue to be false to those true selves that might rise like living water from God within us, from the source of being out of which we sprang, selves that we have never really known. Gabriel Marcel, the French philosopher, quotes Sartre, who looks condescendingly down on the coffeehouse waiter. “For [Sartre],” writes Marcel, “to be the father of a family is always and inevitably to be someone who is playing the father of a family,” while for the simple, uncorrupted man, to be a father as God is a father is to forget both self and fatherhood altogether, dying in order to live and give life.

What was originally meant by God to have been a world both unending in its richness and diversity and a harmonious whole, unified by love, has been distorted into a world seen darkly through the glass of separation and alienation. In the mythopoetic account in the book of Genesis, we are shown how Adam and Eve disobeyed God, taking power into their own hands. A life of self-inflicted pain, of brother killing self and brother, of human beings killing nature in the name of conquest, is the result of that original, ancestral sin. “...cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrow shall you eat the fruits of it all the days of your life...In the

sweat of your face shall you eat bread..." Genesis 3:17-19). The children have grown up in a single moment and know what they have done. Their punishment is the very thing they thought they wanted—to be alone with themselves.

The author of Genesis is not concerned to describe just what Adam and Eve did in their sinning against God. The story simply describes the cause and effect—out of self-love, human beings ran away from intimacy with their loving Father and became parents to themselves. The disobedient children engendered the adults. The pages of the Old Testament, filled with Towers of Babel, harlotries of the heart, violence between brother and brother, nation and nation, dramatically cry out to us that this is our story also. Adam and Eve's sin is ours and our fig leaf-excuses are no different from theirs.

We live in a false world that we continually create within ourselves and show on the "movie screen" or "monitor" or "video display" of our own minds. No one except us comes to this interior theater, but we hardly notice, so in love are we with our own false image and its creator, ourselves. In every movie and video image, we play the hero, refusing to see that we are also the villain. We fear God's terrifying punishment, God's self-revelation as utterly different from our poor selves, and so we hide, not as Adam and Eve did behind fig leaves in their nakedness, but behind the masks and games that separate us from God, from our once-honest child-selves, and from the world around us. Like all pathological liars, in the end we come to believe our own lies. In our "splendid isolation" we tell the world we are happy and healthy, "I feel terrific," even as we drink, and eat ourselves to death. We desperately seek to be loved by others rather than to love them, and we try to take their love by force. We destroy the very love we crave in the depths of our being while our false selves feed on flesh and bone of our brothers and sisters.

If we kill our brothers and sisters, they cannot love us, and without their love we cannot live. We must let our false selves die so that our brothers and sisters may live, and we with them. Yet we seek to place the blame on others for our misery, as poor Adam tries to convince the God of Truth that he was no sinner. "It was the woman you put with me; she gave me the fruit and I ate it" (Genesis 3:12). The hand that kills us is our own, as the hand that took the fruit was Adam's, but we refuse to accept the truth that we ourselves cause our unhappiness. It is no wonder that God pitied and loves us broken, blinded children enough to die at our hands so that we might see God and live.

Saint Paul, who held the coats of the men who stoned the Proto-Martyr Saint Stephen, accepted his guilt because he first had the courage to face his brokenness. Blinded and helpless at the sight of himself as he was, Saint Paul confessed: "For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh enslaved to sin. For I do not know what I do; and I do not do the thing which I want, but I do the thing which I hate. That is exactly what I do. So then if I do that which I do not wish to do, I can testify concerning the law that is good. Now then it is not I who do it, but sin which dominates me. Yet I know that it does not fully dominate me (that is my flesh); but as far as good is concerned, the choice is easy for me to make, but to do it is difficult for me. For it is not the good that I wish to do, that I do; but it is the evil that I do not wish to do, that I do. Now if I do that which I do not wish, then it is not I who do it, but the sin which dominates me. I find therefore that the law agrees with my conscience when I wish to do good, but evil is always near, distracting me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and it makes me a captive of the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this mortal body? I thank God for deliverance through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now therefore with my mind I am a servant of the law of God; but with my flesh I am a servant of the law of sin" (Romans 7:14-25).

In a truthfulness that shattered his false god and false, role-playing self, Saint Paul found out who he really was. We too in moments of crisis in our lives catch a glimpse of our brokenness and a vision of God's revealed Word of what we could be. If we continue to live in the tearing tension of fear and guilt, our anxiety will only grow. We must rise from eating the husks like swine (Luke 15), remember, repent and return to our true home, and be reconciled again with our heavenly Father, whose hands are filled with the Bread of Life.

God's revelation leads us toward a true understanding of our real and our false selves. In the first book of Sacred Scripture, God goes about creation not as an "I" but as a "We." And so we were created in the image of the Community of Love, three persons (hypostases) loving as One, who freely wish to share their love and their life with us. God said, "Let US make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves..." (Genesis 1:26). We are made out of God's infinite and perfect love in order to be loved and to love. God, who is love by nature (1 John 4:8), creates us in order that we might join with each other and with God, sharing in the ecstatic happiness of God's self-giving. In such self-emptying love (kenosis) for the other, each person is born into true identity that bends us toward each other as naturally as flowers toward the light and warmth of the sun.

Saint Paul captures the noble calling that God gives to us human beings: "Just as from the beginning he has chosen us through him before the foundation of the world, that we may become holy and without blemish before him. And he marked us with his love to be his from the beginning, and adopted us to be sons through Jesus Christ, as it pleased his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace that he poured upon us by his beloved one. In him we have salvation, and in his blood, forgiveness of sins, according to the richness of his grace, That, that grace which has abounded in us, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." (Ephesians 1:4-8).

As Saint Paul was all too aware, however, we are not now, strictly speaking, the images of God. Only Jesus Christ, the pre-existent Word of God from all eternity, is perfectly "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). We ourselves are made according to the Logos, the Word in whom all things are made (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16), and carry in our deepest selves the shape of God, as the Ever-Virgin Mary bore the infant Christ. He is not us, but we share with him a family likeness. Never can we lose our resemblance to God. It consists of the potential locked deeply within each of us. But like Christ's grain of wheat, unless the shell be broken and the dynamic potential be freed to burst into abundant, new life (John 12:24), this very godly potential, nagging at our egos like a loving mother at a shiftless son, becomes the source of our greatest frustrations and fears.

Our bodies and souls are meant to be joined into a likeness of God's incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. Instead, from the first moment of our existence, we create a false ego that is less an image of Jesus than an image of sin and death. God's Spirit of Love is not allowed to operate as the guiding force in our lives.

In our first, physical birth, we do not possess a *likeness* to Jesus Christ. Only the Spirit of the risen Lord awakens our conscious life in Christ. From non-existence, we enter the state of *being congruent* with our true self, like a larva filling its chrysalis with wet, curled wings. We bring the potential of our real, secret self to life when God is born in us from moment to moment, each morning of our life a Bethlehem, each night a crucifixion in which we die to our false self. With Christ we rise again in the newness of life, to love and serve.

We are our unique, true selves when we realize that we are children of God, sons or daughters of the Most High, and brothers and sisters of the Only-Begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ. Saint Paul writes: "...and you too have been stamped with the Promise, the pledge of our inheritance which brings freedom for those whom God has taken to his own, to make his

glory praised” (Ephesians 1:13-14). Through a constant conversion or change of heart, we can become new by the love of God. That love is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). We pass over from darkness into light, from our false ego to our true self, from our aloneness to a oneness with Christ. As the seed roots and grows into the tree of life, so in the darkness of our anxious fears we send out limbs that twine with the arms of God around the world.

At creation, the Trinity wrapped itself in love around our mother the cosmos and filled her with the seed of God. The child of that marriage, truly a crowning, of God and matter was Christ the Lord. With him in the joy of conversion we dance face to face, so close we breathe the same air, the Holy Spirit. In this shared life, God experiences our uniqueness as we experience God’s divinity, finding our true selves by looking into God’s face. With Saint Paul we too can say, “There is neither Jew nor Aramean, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Greek nor barbarian, slave nor freeman; but Christ is all and in all men” (Colossians 3:11).

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