

OUR SPIRITUALITY: 3rd SUNDAY OF LENT C

If we browse through the magazines in our doctor's or dentist's waiting-rooms, we will probably come across an article on spirituality. Lately too, the lists of *best-sellers* often include works related to the human spirit or soul. People are no longer satisfied with material things only. So, in their search for satisfaction and self-fulfilment today, people have been looking for meaning and value beyond the material and the physical.

So far, so good! But not all agree on what is meaningful and valuable in life. For some, being '*spiritual*' is focussed on a sense of harmony with all living things, and openness to the great power upholding our intricate universe. For others it includes meditation and relaxation exercises for the sake of inner peace and relaxation and for the sake of greater physical and mental energy. For some it's mixed up with trances or alleged messages from outer space or from dead friends and relatives. In so-called '*New Age Spirituality*' it often involves tarot cards and crystals.

In some searches for the spiritual there is a concentration on the '*self*' rather than on the '*Other*' or '*the others*'. There is little or no awareness at all of such people in need as the poor and the suffering. In other searches for the spiritual there is little sense of the reality of evil. Everything in the garden is rosy. Everything is viewed through rose-coloured glasses. Such spiritualities seem rather selfish and inward-looking, or an escape from reality and a flight into fantasy.

But there's another kind of spirituality - Christian spirituality - which you and I have been sincerely trying to live. It's based on the conviction that a meaningful life is all about good relationships. In relation to ourselves we know that '*God doesn't make junk*'. So we value ourselves and respect our own dignity, and we work on becoming better persons, knowing that God is patient with us, and hasn't finished with us yet. In relation to other people, we look for the good in them, and deal with them with acceptance, trust, affection and care. In relation to God we treat God as our origin, the ultimate source of our existence. We treat God too as the one who sustains us through all the ups and downs of life. And we treat God as our final destiny, the one who is waiting to take us into his embrace at the end of this life.

So for us life is both personal and interpersonal. God is much more than the great Architect, who designed this amazing universe, and much more than the great Clockmaker, who keeps it ticking over. No! God is Father, Mother, Friend, and Love Itself with a capital '*L*'. We hear God speaking to us, and we respond to God. With thoughts, words and actions of praise and thanksgiving! With thoughts, words and actions of love and self-offering! We converse with God as familiarly as friends talk with one another, as intimately as a wife speaks with her husband, or as children chat with their parents.

So, in today's First Reading we hear God say (directly to Moses, and indirectly to us): '*I am the God of your ancestors, the God of your fathers and mothers. I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. . . . I*

am well aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them up out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow.' In response to this powerful assurance from God that God cares when people suffer, that God is a liberator who acts to deliver people from oppression of every kind, we have answered again and again: '*The Lord is kind and merciful; the Lord is kind and merciful*'.

Our conversation with God continues in this Mass we are celebrating together. In a few moments we will be declaring in the Creed all that God has done for us and for our people down the ages. In our Prayer of the Faithful we will speak words of trust and petition. In our Eucharistic Prayer, we will start with words of joyful praise and thanksgiving, and go on to words of petition for a variety of people both living and dead.

In short, our spirituality as Christians is immensely and intensely personal and interpersonal. We sense that our God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. We cannot stop ourselves from reaching out to the love and goodness which is God. In fact we cannot even understand ourselves or describe ourselves, except in relation to God. So much so that we are convinced that God enters into the very definition of who we are as human beings. We find meaning and value in a personal and community relationship with a personal God, a God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the God whom we meet in our readings from scripture! This is our kind of spirituality!

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