

Monastic Musings

News and Views of the Eastern Rite Monastics
of the
Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church

November 2011

From the Idle keyboard

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb

The end of the Church year is drawing near for Christians. Advent will start on Sunday, November 27. Advent is the period of time within the Church that we prepare ourselves once again for the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is period of time we get to once again take a look back over the past year and see where we may have not lived our lives as Jesus taught us and what have we accomplished as a Christian in our lives and in our communities. Advent is a period of time for introspection and planning for what each of us needs to do spiritually this next year.



I suspect that one area that we all need to take a look at is: how willing are we to challenge our spiritual thinking. Are you willing to push your spiritually boundaries to view other possibilities? Are you willing to challenge what you have been taught? Are you open to discuss other spiritual teachings? Or are you “stuck” in your spirituality at the level that you were taught as a child? Have you challenged ourselves to take a look at what other faiths/churches teach and why? To grow as a Christian, one must be willing to question what one was taught. It does not mean that we throw away what we believe, but we build on it and adjust it as is necessary to be more like the Child of God we proclaim ourselves to be.

Let us start this new church year with the willingness to examine our spiritual life and to be open to hearing what others have to teach us. Let us not to judge the teaching because we have been told not to listen to them, but to open our hearts and see just what value the teachings might have for us. You will find yourself in for a big surprise in the long run. Our faith is constantly growing if we allow it: however, it can only grow if we are challenging ourselves to learn more and gain a deeper understanding of others.

May this Advent season bring a rebirth of Jesus within you. May you find peace and love in searching for the “real truth” as taught to us by God through Jesus!

Restless Hearts

by Rev. Myrella LeClair

Bishop Barb and I were recently enjoying the company of our dear friend “Gunny”. At some point in the conversation, we started discussing our various spiritual journeys. Between the three of us, there were many spiritual paths we had encountered: Southern Baptist, Jehovah’s Witness, Hinduism (in the form of Hare Krishna), Lutheran (High Church), Amish, Mennonite, Reformed Brethren, Roman Catholic, Spiritualist, Native American, Religious Science, Old Catholic, Charismatic Catholic, United Church of Christ, Gnosticism, and Independent Orthodox.

For those of you who have never deviated from a single spiritual path, you may not understand the restlessness of each of our hearts. Encountering these various pathways led us to where we are now: Gunny in an “*Open Doors, Open Minds, Open Hearts*” United Methodist Church, and Bishop Barb and I in an independent Orthodox Catholic Church. All three of us believe in the one triune God, who is always beside us and forgives us despite our failings. Although our Church’s differ in some beliefs as well as worship practices, we see one another first and foremost as Christians. Our unity in Christ is more important than any differences in doctrine, worship and practice. In that unity, however, we do not see people of other Christian denominations -- or of other faiths -- as the enemy. God created each one of us, and I firmly believe that He is a loving father – no matter what theological beliefs we hold or practice. He even loves His children who choose to believe that He does not exist (atheists) or who are skeptical of His existence (agnostics). Since we are made in God’s image and likeness, we also must love as one another as He does.



If you cannot find in your heart to reach out to non-Christians, then I pray that you will at least reach out to other Christians. We Christians must stop looking at one another as the enemy unless we are willing to return to the “Dark Ages” when Christians brutalized one another over their beliefs. In his article entitled “Christian Civility: The Test of Intra-Faith Relations”, ordained American Baptist minister and Senior Religion Editor for the Huffington Post, Rev. Paul Brandeis Raushenbush writes:

“The focus of civility within the Christian life is the kingdom of God to which we are all granted citizenship through our faith. In God’s kingdom, we are bound by the covenant of the two great commandments: that we love God and love our neighbor -- even those whom we imagine to be our enemies -- as ourselves. Civility in the kingdom of God demands a commitment to reconciliation that goes to the heart of the Gospel.”

“The advantage of being authentically engaged with people whose beliefs differ from our own is that it serves as a safeguard against idolizing our own ideology. If we are around only people who nod affirmatively we risk the casual merging our own truth with the Gospel truth and subsuming the Way of Jesus to our own way. When we become adherents of our own certitude, our faith can calcify and stagnate. Christian Civility requires humility, a somewhat under-emphasized virtue among Christian leaders. Yet our commitment to “walk humbly with our God,” as Micah requires, gives space for us to learn and grow from God and from our Christian brothers.”

In this upcoming Advent season as you celebrate the First Coming of Christ and prepare for His Second Coming, truly awaken to Christ. Be willing to open your minds and hearts to other Christians – even to other faiths – and challenge your thinking and spirituality. Your searching may inspire the understanding that there is one God with many pathways leading to Him.

Searching Out My Spirituality

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb

I look back at my religious upbringing and realize just how lucky I have been. I grew up with parents from two different churches: my mother was a Southern Missionary Baptist and my father was a high church Lutheran. Given that the church of my relatives (on my father's side) was Lutheran, I was raised as a Lutheran and practiced that faith until I graduated from high school. My parents saw that I had a sound religious foundation as taught by the Lutherans, but they were also open to my searching and questioning what was taught. Since my father was of the Pennsylvania Dutch heritage, I was also introduced to several other religious faiths. I have relatives who are either Brethren or Mennonite in addition to the high church Lutheran. I also had the chance to be around the Old Order Amish as a child.

I joined the Roman Catholic Church when I was attending an RC Nursing School and College and joined a religious community (OSF), though I had been introduced to it as a teenager. In this period of exploration, I spent many years as a “proud” Roman Catholic and a professed nun, but over time, I found I was not completely spiritually happy there either. I felt empty in many ways and also felt trapped by the “rules” without being able to express my inner spirituality. I was one of those who would question the reason for doing something, and not just do it because I was told it was the “rule” of the church to do so. In time I realized that I needed to take time to explore my spirituality and to find a church home where this exploration was not a detriment!



Over time I ended up in the independent church movement, specifically the Old Catholic and independent Orthodox Churches. In my spiritual travels, I always “forced” myself to explore and be open to other thinking in order to “challenge” my spiritual thinking. I came into contact with Spiritualists who practiced the use of aura and gems. I also found myself drawn toward the Native American Indian spirituality given that my mother was one-quarter Native American Indian. I would suspect that my Native American Indian spirituality often rules more of my spiritual life than any other spiritual pathway. It really taught me to “get in tune” with God and nature and to be who God is calling me to be! It has been very freeing to me over these many years.

In this process of searching I have found that often faiths “select” what they want to teach or not teach instead of teaching the full truth that Jesus gave us in his teachings. It is sad that this “selectiveness” has really created such division among people. That is not what Jesus was teaching. He taught us that God gave us his commandments to live by and that man had taken to redefining those commandments as they pleased. Remember his admonishment to the Pharisees and Sadducees of the Jewish Temple? In God we are united – this is what Jesus was teaching us. But this is not what so many Churches were teaching! They want to teach division depending on how a denomination or individual interprets the Bible.

I remember the day I visited with my parents after I had been out on my own for several years. We were sitting at the dinner table talking about spirituality and churches. Like a very innocent child, I calmly stated that the first five books of the Old Testament were nothing more than “camp fire” stories of what people had been taught/heard about the founding of this world and the happenings of the people up to the point of Moses and the escape from Egypt. Both my parents sat there very quietly at first not knowing what to say. So, I added, how could Moses be the author of the books if he did not live in those days? No, the proper term would be editor. He learned of the stories from the Jews that he met and lived with in Egypt. Oral history is important, but unfortunately, as it gets passed down through the generations, things get changed. Thus this is why I call those books “camp fire” stories. Well, that did cause a little consternation with my mother! Remember she is Southern Missionary Baptist! But after a few moments she looked straight at me and told me I had a very valid point in my thinking. Even my father had to agree that I had a point in what I was saying. From that day forward our religious talks became very open and honest, searching for what might be the truth as taught by Jesus and not just by what churches taught. They became strong supporters of my calling to become a priest. My mother was so proud on the day I was ordained an Old Catholic/Orthodox priest as she handed the Archbishop my chalice and paten and I celebrated my first Liturgy/Mass. I suspect my father would have been just as proud, but he had passed on 10 years earlier. He knew I was working on my theological degrees and Orthodox theology studies and wholeheartedly supported me in all of my studies and where the studies were leading me.

Have I changed my opinion about the Bible? Not really. Moses did a great job writing down the religious history of the Jews as he knew it. The rest of the Old Testament holds much concerning teachings as taught by the Jewish faith, which really is the basis of the Christian faith. What I find hard to accept is that over the centuries, man has taken the original words written and reinterpreted them to supposedly make them easier for people to read/understand. But you know what, the meanings of the original writings end up getting changed. In the process, what we call the Bible today has no appearance as to the Bible of the ancients! We have lost in many ways what was orally taught through generations of the faithful. When the first writing started, changes came into being again.

For me, the New Testament is the guiding force in my life, especially the teaching directly from Jesus in the Gospels. Jesus was trying to teach us to stop interpreting God’s words, but to live by them in our lives. It is through our interpretations that we get into trouble. Yes, man can err in the way he understands what is said and thus the error is then set in his writings. For me, I prefer to find the oldest possible written scriptures of the Bible to study. The words can be a little awkward in their usage, but the original meanings seem to be more alive.

I also like to study many other faiths so that I can hopefully gain a better understanding of what God has been teaching. Remember, there really is only one God who has come to be known by many different names in this world we live in. Each faith/religion has elected to build their beliefs on “some portion” of the words of God that they feel was important to them so that they would be seen as different from the next religion/faith. Through studying these different religion/s faiths, you soon see that what is taught in the Bible is the truth as held by the Christians. You soon learn just how many faiths have the same Old Testament writings and some even the New Testament writings as we Christians do. In the process you start to look at other people not for their faith but who they really are, a child of God! And thus you start to find common ground with others.

So are you ready to move out of your “comfort zone” and challenge yourself to learn all you can about what is your spiritual foundation? Are you willing for a moment to put aside what you have

been taught and see what other faiths are teaching? You will be amazed at just how much your faith will be strengthened in this searching and learning. Challenge yourself this year to learn all you can about other faiths, the history of the bible, and the Christian Church! You will find that it is a wonderful "trip" to take with many wonders to learn!

Prayer Requests

Mom LeClair
Br. Yossi and Jim
Linda and Wayne
Bill, Monica, and Joe
Jenney, Doug, and family
Fr. David and family
Fr. Rick Hobbs
Our Archbishop -- +Charles Smith, OSF

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