



Monastic Musings

Living in and Practicing the Presence of God

Spring 2016

And Spring Has Arrived

by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall



Spring arrived with a gift to the Northeast this year – snow for the first day of Spring! But then in early April we were hit with two days of snow. Guess Mother Nature had to show she -- not the calendar -- still ruled the weather. As many of you are aware, most of Massachusetts was spared from a lot of snow this winter. In the area where I live, we only received around 20 inches which is much less than normal for us. But I am not complaining in the least bit! Yes, we had some really cold periods as normal, but they were relatively short-lived. It also meant that the animal life did not get into a really good winter's sleep. Black bears were out early looking for food in every bird feeder they could locate. The smaller animals were also out looking for their food; although for some, it was way too early given the food had not grown yet. And for those who really enjoy visiting a Maple Sugar Shack, the sap was running slowly this year making it very difficult for the syrup producers. Even the small nest that the female squirrel built last Fall outside of my kitchen window did not make it through the wind/rain we had in the middle of March. I give her credit for it lasting that long actually. It is all a result of the El Niño that came through North America!

All of this change in the weather causes one to look at the world a little differently I suspect. So many people have been affected one way or another by the severe weather these last 6 months or so. Many lives have been lost and many families have been broken. But through it all, life goes on. I pray that people have been able to put aside their religious biases/judgments to help those around them as is needed. That is what God would want of us.

Passover

by: Fr. Ron Lahti

As this newsletter goes out we are in the midst of Pesach, Passover. Thanks to Cecil B. DeMille and **The 10 Commandments** most of the world knows about how the Jews were miraculously freed from slavery in Egypt and began their journey to their promised home land, Israel. We know the suffering of the Jews in Egypt, the miraculous preservation of Moses from infanticide, his sojourn in the wilderness, his calling by G-d and then the miracles which failed to turn the heart of Pharaoh, the lamb's blood on the door posts and the death of the first born, and the "hasty meal" of lamb and unleavened bread. Then came the pillar of fire, the parting of the sea, the relapse of the Jews into idol worship, their repentance, the 40 years of wandering before finally crossing into the Promised Land. The Jews were commanded to remember these events by eating only unleavened bread every year for seven days. Today this story will be

retold around millions of tables around the world in answer to the simple question by the youngest child “Why is this night different from all others?”

From the beginning, Christianity has also identified with this holiday. First because, of course, the death of Jeshua Ben Joseph (Jesus) is recorded as having occurred around Pesach, and at least in some accounts, the last supper Jeshua shared with his disciples was the Pesach Seder (meal). This Meal was chosen by Jeshua to establish a rite in which He promised to remain with his followers forever within the forms of bread and wine. These too are familiar stories which are retold not once a year but weekly at every Liturgy. This year, I would like to offer another reflection on these stories taken from the Jewish tradition.

Rabbi Meir Elkabas, a great teacher of Torah from whom I have learned much over the years, pointed out that while everyone focuses on the miracles and the slaughtering of the lamb (which is forbidden to be eaten for Pesach since the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70ce), the one element which has remained over the millennia is the *Matzah*, the unleavened bread which the Jews were commanded to eat on the first Pesach and to eat every year to commemorate the Pesach. *Matzah* stands in contrast to *Chametz* – leavened bread. *Matzah* is simply flour and water – pure elements without mixture with other elements. *Chametz* is flour and water, but mixed with yeast or other elements, which sour and ferment the mixture. Rebbe Elkabas showed us that *Matzah* is the pure mind, the mind which is filled only with the purity of Torah and G-d’s Light. *Chametz* represents that same mind but “mixed” with foreign and polluting elements – elements he described as human philosophy, vain imaginations and foul thinking which “sours and ferments” our original, pure minds.



The day before Pesach, Jews around the world take great pains to rid their homes of any crumb or sign of *Chametz*. Likewise, we are called to rid our minds of anything that has covered, tainted or polluted our minds – anything that has become a veil between us and G-d. Rebbe Elkabas showed us how the word *Matzah* is etymologically related to the Aramaic word *Matzutah* – strife, fight. So the lesson is that clearing our minds of the clutter takes work, effort. We must firmly decide to clear away negative, self-defeating or, G-d forbid, profane thinking – to allow our minds to be clear, pure and bright to receive the Torah of G-d, the Word of the Living One - which Jews will celebrate in 50 or so days on Shavuot, the giving of Torah at the base of the Holy Mountain, and which is celebrated as Pentecost by Christians.

So, during this time, let’s think about those things that might still be “souring and fermenting” our minds and strive to eradicate them, know that in doing so we will experience the Light and Presence of G-d in our everyday lives.

Are You A “Christian” in Name Only?

by: Rev. Myrella LeClair

When I began writing this article, it was Good Friday – the day of Jesus’ crucifixion and the beginning of what would become a religion that became known as “Christian”. I do not believe that Jesus ever intended for his teachings to be the basis of another religion. Rather, he wanted to bring the good news of eternal life to all who were willing to listen that we are all equally the children of the Creator, and that we too are inheritors of the Kingdom. Kingdoms on earth were inconsequential because the true Kingdom is not located here in this world. Jesus spoke of loving one another, being kind and merciful to one another, of rendering to Caesar what was

Caesar's, of not being hypocrites. He welcomed all and loved all – even those who were considered unworthy of being loved.

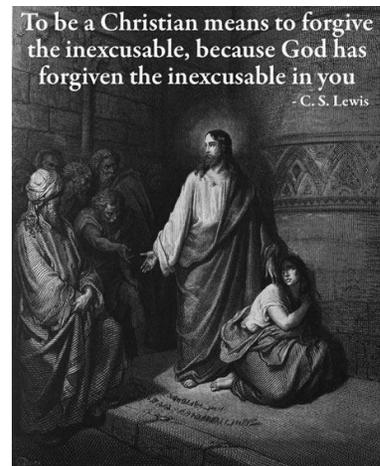
So, how could the crowd who welcomed and praised Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem turn against him five days later? What caused the sudden shift of mind from shouting “hosanna” to “crucify him”? Perhaps, the people expected Jesus to wipe out the Roman legions and establish an earthly kingdom and when Jesus did not do so, they no longer wanted to have anything to do with Him. They were a fickle crowd, followers only so long as His teachings agreed with their beliefs about who was *worthy* of being loved. Certainly, they thought that Jesus did not think that their persecutors were worthy of being loved. The people in the crowd sought deliverance from their persecutors, but Jesus's love was inclusive of **all** of humanity – even those who did the persecuting. Jesus said:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35 (New King James Version)

What Jesus was also saying to His disciples/listeners was for them to not sink to the level of becoming a persecutor:

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.” Luke 6:27-28 (New King James Version)

Was Jesus asking too much of them? Knowing what Jesus accomplished while he was on this earth, is Jesus asking too much of us who now dwell on this earth? I believe that the answer to both of those questions is a resounding “No”. We know that we humans can quickly go from being the persecuted to being the persecutor, but we can also *choose* to turn away from that kind of behavior. Note that the crowd surrounding Jesus quickly changed their mindset once he did not follow their collective interpretation of what he should do. They knew that Jesus was capable of working miracles, and some members of the crowd had probably even been the benefactors of Jesus' miracles. Yet, they could not or would not look beyond their own perceptions. Unfortunately, the major problem for humans is that each one of us has a different perception/view/interpretation of every situation, person, etc. Therefore, judging based on our individual perceptions is dangerous since each person has created her/his own worldview and judges everything based on her/his own perceptions. That is why Jesus admonished us to:



“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Luke 6:37 (New King James Version)

In 2016, it is very disheartening that many who call themselves Christians or who have designated their places of worship as Christian Churches apparently do not practice Jesus' main commandment of loving one another, no matter who the person is, what religious beliefs they hold, what country they live in, what their political beliefs are, what gender they are, what lifestyle they live or what race they may be. What is it about loving one another that some “Christians” and/or “Christian Churches” do not understand or refuse to understand? So many of these so-called Christian Churches throughout the world still have not learned to stand

together as followers of Jesus the Christ but instead teach divisiveness, intolerance – even outright hatred of those who hold theological and biblical views different from their own Christian religious beliefs. Jesus was very clear in his message of being loving and refraining from judgment: he ministered to *all* who listened to His call and followed Him. He selected a tax collector as an apostle. He ministered to the Samaritan woman. He ministered to the sick, lame, and poor. *Never* did he turn his back on anyone. To be a believer in Jesus the Christ, you must not only believe in His message of Love, Forgiveness, and Mercy but apply it to all whom you encounter. You can be baptized; you can go to religious services, you can deeply believe in Christ but **unless** you actually do as He commanded, can you truly call yourself a follower of Jesus the Christ – a “Christian” unless you live by and exemplify his teachings?

And so we pray....Jesus, let me see your face in all the faces I look upon and let me remember that your Light, Joy and Peace abide in all of us. Let me love as you loved. Amen.

Peace be with you!

Celebrating One's Faith

by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall

I was thinking the other day as I was reading articles on different religious celebrations within non-Christian religions, why is it that Christians always seem to be so sad with their celebrations?



What really brought this to mind was an article about Holi, the Hindu Festival of Colors which is celebrated around the same time that Easter is within the Christian faiths. For many, Easter is a really dark celebration for 40 days then finally on Easter Day, joy is to return. But from where I sit, I really don't see many people truly celebrating the joy of Easter except through the children as they hunt for the colored eggs, eat their candy and play with the new toy they receive. The joy seems to be lost for the adults.

Easter should be a period of time of reflection on the gift that Jesus gave us through his death. If you look at the whole story of Easter from the moment Jesus enters Jerusalem until His Resurrection, you see that He is teaching us that we pass through this world leaving a mark on those we come into contact with and when we leave this world, we return to our holy selves as a child of God. In Jesus' death we see all of the pain that life can often give us but also we see the love that Jesus shared with the two who died with him and those who stood at His feet. In the time He spent in the grave, He reached out to those who loved God and brought them with Him into Heaven when He resurrected. So why are the adults so sad on Easter? Did not Jesus give us something to truly celebrate? That life, even when it is most difficult to deal with, can have a “happy ending” if we remember that we are a child of God and are truly loved by God.

Let me look at this “darkness” in another manner. So many Christians see death as a sad moment - probably from the way we have seen Holy Week and Easter celebrated. But really, death is not sad; it is a time that should be celebrated! It is a time where one realizes that the person has now moved on to another life but still remains solid in our memories guiding and directing us, much like the Holy Spirit does. We should be celebrating all that this person who has died shared with us and gave us since that was their purpose here on earth -- just as Jesus' purpose on earth was to help us to see a new way to live in God's love. Funerals are much like Holy Saturday. But remember that on Holy Saturday, the light returns to the church. Easter is

the time that the body transforms from the human body form to the new spiritual body – resurrection! That should be celebrated with lots of joy!

Yes, as adults we have so many “duties” that we are required to fulfill with family during Eastertime, but cannot we for a while be just like the little children and have our hearts and lives filled with joy? As pronounced in the Eastern Orthodox Churches when greeting one another on Easter: Christ is Risen; He is Risen Indeed! It is said with joy and happiness that Jesus has shown us the way forward in God’s Love.

Christ is Risen; He is Risen Indeed!

Χριστός Ανέστη? Είναι όντως ανέστη!

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All writings are the views of the author(s) on a particular subject and are meant to challenge your thinking so as to help you grow in your spiritual walk with God.

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