



Monastic Musings

Living in and Practicing the Presence of God

Summer/Fall 2015



This Newsletter is dedicated to the memory of Felicitas Lucero, beloved mother of Sam Lucero, spouse of Fr. Ron Lahti. She passed into eternal peace on August 19, 2015. May she rest in God's Loving arms.

Kaddish

by Fr. Ron Lahti

Prayer for the departed is found, in some form or other, in just about all spiritual traditions. The prayers are intended to assist the departing one in transitioning to a new life – kind of like spiritual midwifery.

This past month, my spouse Sam and I had the blessing of being with Sam's mother, Felicitas, as she passed from this world. She had a stroke over eight years ago, and Sam and I had cared for her and her husband since then. We really did not think the illness which she contracted, a particularly harsh UTI, would take her from us. However, with the weakened condition of her body following the UTI, her COPD, a condition she had for many years, finally flared and she was not able to fight any more.

The two mornings before she passed, Sam and I asked our friend Metropolitan Archbishop Barsanuphius to offer the prayer for the sick, and then on the last day the prayers for the departing. Felicitas, like her whole family, are Roman Catholics. But what was a blessing was to watch as Felicitas repeated the Eastern Rite prayers along with Fr. Barsanuphius. Her passing was peaceful, surrounded by love and with no pain or struggle.

Something that even many of Sam’s own family don’t know is that their family history has some interesting turns. Aside from being direct descendants of Christopher Columbus (a really interesting story for another time), they are *Conversos* – Jews who, while succumbing outwardly to forced conversion to Christianity in Spain during the Inquisitions, still kept their Jewish faith, with many practices secret. In order to escape the persecutions of the Inquisitors, many of these families fled Spain for the New World – settling in Spanish territories of what is now the American Southwest. Over the centuries most of the descendants of these *Conversos* forgot their histories and their Jewishness, remaining practicing Roman Catholics. Today, many *Conversos* are re-discovering their Jewish heritage.

Why all this history in a theological reflection? Well, given the loss of Sam’s mother, and my friend and mother-in-law Felicitas, I started meditating on the prayer traditions for the dead in Christianity (Roman and Eastern Orthodox) and in Judaism (they are *Conversos* after all). In Christianity, most of us are familiar with the many traditional prayers for the departed, most of which in some form or other involve deeply felt pleas that the departed one’s sins are forgiven and the departed is allowed to enter into the rest of heaven:

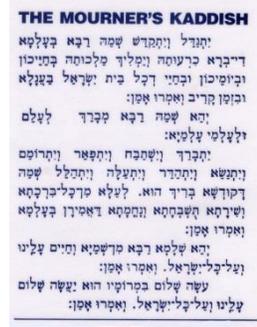
O God of spirits and of all flesh, Who hast trampled down death and overthrown the Devil, and given life to Thy world, do Thou, the same Lord, give rest to the souls of Thy departed servants in a place of brightness, a place of refreshment, a place of repose, where all sickness, sighing, and sorrow have fled away. Pardon every transgression which they have committed, whether by word or deed or thought. For Thou art a good God and lovest mankind; because there is no man who lives yet does not sin, for Thou only art without sin, Thy righteousness is to all eternity, and Thy word is truth.

For Thou are the Resurrection, the Life, and the Repose of Thy servants who have fallen asleep, O Christ our God, and unto Thee we ascribe glory, together with Thy Father, who is from everlasting, and Thine all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever unto ages of ages. Amen. (Panikhida Service)

But then I looked at the Jewish tradition of prayer for the dead, *Kaddish*. *Kaddish* is a Hebrew word which simply means “Holy”. The prayer in translation is as follows:

May His Great Name grow exalted and sanctified (cong.: Amen) in the world that He created as He willed. May He give reign to His Kingship in your lifetimes and in your days, and in the lifetimes of the entire Family of Israel, swiftly and soon. Now respond: Amen (cong.:Amen. May His Great Name be blessed forever and ever.)

May His Great Name be blessed forever and ever.



Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled, mighty, upraised, and lauded be the Name of the Holy One, Blessed is He (cong.: Blessed is He) beyond any blessing and song, praise and consolation that are uttered in the world. (cong.: Amen)

May there be abundant peace from Heaven, and life, upon us and upon all Israel. (cong.: Amen)

The first thing that's apparent is that the departed person is not mentioned at all, even indirectly. In fact, no mention is made of death. There is also no mention made of sin or forgiveness. The entire prayer is a bold proclamation of praise of *Hashem* (the Name, a term used out of respect for G-d's Great Name). According to Jewish tradition, this prayer is never said alone – it is to be recited only in the presence of a *minyan* (10 Jewish men (sic), but more often today meaning any 10 Jews). The departed one's loved ones are bound to recite this prayer every day for 11 months following the death of the loved one, and then on the *yahrzeit* (anniversary) of the departed's death annually thereafter.

I find the *kaddish* surprisingly more comforting than Christian prayers for the dead. The reason I think is because instead of focusing on the loss, the sadness, and the fear (how else can we explain constant repetition of "Please forgive ...,") surrounding our experience of death, the focus shifts to a reaffirmation that *Hashem* is still in control. *Hashem* created all that is, "according to *Hashem's* will", all is unfolding as it is supposed to unfold. And we pray that we can experience *Hashem's* "reign", or as I prefer to see it, "unfolding" in each of our individual lives, as well as in the community and world. We acknowledge that *Hashem* is beyond any description or understanding, and the Mystery that *Hashem* is leaves us speechless. This includes the mystery of why we die, and what the World to Come is all about. But in spite of *Hashem's* unutterable Unknowable-ness, we don't respond in fear, but in praise and joy and awe. Finally, we make a request for Peace, and continuing Life for we have affirmed that indeed these also are the Essence of *Hashem*.

In short, I see the Mourner's *Kaddish* as a re-affirmation of the *Shema* (a proclamation of faith which is repeated twice daily): "*Hear O Israel, Hashem is our Lord, Hashem is One*" - *Hashem is One*. In reality, there is no-thing that is not *Hashem*, including this mystery we call death. The comfort I can derive is that my mother-in-law Felicitas is in *Hashem*, just as we are in *Hashem*, and in *Hashem* we are never really separated as long as we place ourselves in *Hashem-Peace and Hashem-Love*.

May there be abundant peace from *Hashem*, and Life, upon us all and upon all of *Hashem's* children...and you may say AMEN!

Summer is just over and fall has started...

by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall

Summer is just over and we are now into fall. It seems that 2015 continues once again to have strange weather in different locations of the US. The West Coast is in drought, although the weather forecasters are pointing to a very strong El Nino that is to hit the West Coast this fall/winter. They need the water but not all at once! The Midwest is having lots of nasty storms, either too much rain, wind, tornadoes, or they are not getting enough! The East coast is having periods of really wet weather then hot dry weather. But actually, it has been cooler here in the New England area than normal. Mother Nature continues to amaze me as the climate is changing in all areas of the US, and one never knows what to expect on a daily basis. Even the weather forecasters seem not to be able to predict as accurately as they once did. I have learned to go with the flow. You carry with you rain protection even if it is sunny out as there could be a sudden pop up rain cloud. You definitely want to be able to layer your clothes since you never know what might happen in the next hour. It does keep things interesting as to when to get your outside chores done. I learned this summer that procrastination just is not the way to go!

I was chuckling to myself the other day. I was in the kitchen preparing supper and just happened to look out the window into the oak tree. There was this very young squirrel having great "fun" gathering her small branches and leaves to build her nest with. This was her very first attempt at building a nest. At one point she was dangling from the major branch by one rear foot. I thought, "oh no, she is going to fall", but she really has learned the art of hanging on while chewing off and pulling up the small branches to be used. I enjoy watching the various critters that wander into my eyesight on a daily basis. The adults and their young can teach us so much about life if we just let them. There is our young groundhog who is constantly bombarded by the birds. He has finally learned to ignore them! Now they are after the baby bunny, but given the little one is eating the juicy grass, the birds are once again ignored. I realize the birds are trying to protect what they feel is theirs, but really, a groundhog or bunny cannot get up a tree and steal eggs! The birds are just being bullies.



When we look at animals and how they act and then at humans, there is really very little difference in the long run. I find it so interesting that the animals actually mirror humans more than we would ever like to admit. Or is it we mirror them? But in watching them, we can also learn some really valuable lessons in life. The biggest lesson we can learn is how we interact with others. In my area of viewing, there is a large shed that is set off the ground some. It has become the "home" of many animals over the years. Presently under the shed the space is shared by the rabbit family, skunk family, and the groundhog. All seem to get along very well as you never see or hear any issues from that area. So what are the lessons from this small "triplex home"? Are we drawing people towards us with our way of living or are we pushing people away from us? God set us on this earth to have us draw people towards us through His love. Are we willing to step out and help someone else without putting any restrictions on that help? Are we willing for a moment to stop what we are doing and offer a hand to someone else that may need the help? Or are we like the birds I see around my home that act as bullies to the poor creatures that really could never hurt them?





View from my kitchen window – the playground of the critters

Given that Mother Myrella and I retired from our secular jobs at the end of July, I know I will have even more time to enjoy nature around me and have time to participate with nature. This will be a blessing for me actually as I have always loved the creatures around me. Give me an opportunity and I would go find a small cabin in the woods where I could just contemplate nature all day/night. People have been asking: “what are you going to do with your free time?” Well, this “retirement” will give me time to do more reading, meditation, and even teaching. And I will have all the time in the world to concentrate on working in God’s vineyard wherever He takes me. I am just allowing myself to listen to the Holy Spirit’s voice guiding me forward on a daily basis. Yes, there are some things that must be accomplished to keep the household going, but I sure will have more free time to enjoy reaching out to others and to explore the area around me. Life has just become so full of adventures for me and I cannot wait to see what the Holy Spirit has in store!

“YOU CAN LEAVE NOW!”

By Rev. Myrella LeClair

With those four words spoken to me by my former manager, my 10+ years of employment came to an abrupt end. (I was in mid-sentence, answering my supervisor’s question, when I was interrupted.) Yes, I was retiring but I never would have thought that my exit would end with those four words. I was so stunned that I just picked up my handbag and briefcase and quickly walked out the door, feeling unappreciated and disappointed. However, as soon as I closed the door for the last time, dejection turned to elation. I was now free from the environment – going from darkness to light. Strangely, my thoughts then turned to the instructions that Jesus had given to his 12 followers chosen to spread the good news:

“If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But, if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.” (Matthew 10:7 NKJV)

“And whoever will not receive your words when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.” (Matthew 10:13-14 NKJV)



My peace returned to me as soon as I remembered Jesus' instructions. In a sense, that event was an epiphany for me. For the past 10 months, my words at work were not thought worthy of hearing. I can now look now upon that time period as an extended spiritual learning experience. I learned that what a person professes as their work and/or life motto or values does not necessarily equate to practicing what is being preached/professed. We humans are often selective as to whom we apply our values to. We judge others either as worthy or not worthy of our love, mercy, and compassion. For those we deem worthy, we listen to their words. Yet, if we "see" with Christ's eyes, all are worthy. Is it difficult to do so? Of course! There were quite a number of times that Jesus had to admonish his apostles for their self-centeredness, obtuseness, and lack of love. They often failed miserably at understanding, listening, or practicing what Jesus taught them: that His greatest commandment is to "Love one another." He even had to reappear to them after His death so that they would believe in His message of unconditional Love for all.

On the surface, it appears that Christ's words in Matthew 10 are contradictory; however, re-read that chapter with the understanding that we are to love one another. If someone chooses not to listen or to accept the peace that you offer, then the only thing left to do is to bless them by shaking off the dust of that situation and allowing Peace to return to you. Do not take up the swords of anger and hate against those who refuse to hear but be merciful and pray for them – not as a Pharisee would but rather as Christ prayed.

Almost two weeks have passed since I was told "You can leave now". Those words no longer anger me nor do the experiences of the last 10 months which created such disquietude within me. The dust has now settled, and I am at peace as I turn to spending more time tending to and walking on my spiritual pathway with Christ by my side.

May the Peace of Christ be with you!

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