

Monastic Scribe X: September 3, 2021

BACK TO NORMAL!?

About a month ago I thought the pandemic was over. Our churches, as well as many other locations, were open again. We left our masks behind and we felt rescued from our isolation. I felt great relief. Then the virus was back and strong again, especially in some areas where people were not vaccinated. Some say this is to be an on-going epidemic which can yearly come back.

As if this were not enough to disturb us, on August 9th the United Nations released a report, its first report on climate change since 2013. According to this report we are due for a future of rising temperatures and extreme weather. Stronger and more frequent storms and heat waves, combined with intense drought are also offered to us. They warned us that much is unavoidable in the coming decades though we still can make choices to slow down the inevitability of disaster.

The next U.N. climate summit, COP26, will be held November 1 – 12 in Scotland. Pope Francis is due to attend. It is six years since he issued his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, in which he called us to do all we could to protect our common home. The American public, including the Catholic Church, have been slow to respond to his message. For four years the federal government ignored and berated the message. I'm scared!

I am tempted to hide from all this, deny it, or try to ignore it. But our faith challenges me in all of this. Our central belief as Christians is the resurrection. We believe in life through death, not just life after death. Death is part of the cosmos. New life demands someone or something dies. Our attempts to keep things as they have been and not change are futile. We live in an imperfect world still evolving daily with God in the very evolutionary process. We have done much in the past couple of hundred years to stymie the natural evolution process and thus the work of God. We have been fighting God! Pope Francis has said that God will always forgive; human beings sometimes forgive; but nature never forgives.

What am I to do about all of this? First of all, wear my mask, make sure I have been vaccinated – no excuse! Secondly, do all I can to curb the use of fossil fuels and stop deforestation. But all of this requires something deeper. We can no longer live as we did before the pandemic. Our world view has to be more of a

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contemplative way of life. Above all, we need to get back in touch with nature, with natural rhythms, with our inter-dependence with all matter especially all living beings. Western culture has been living in a domination mode over nature, using nature as useful things for our benefit. If we get back to nature as much as we can, we will find healing and direction. I find this really basic.

I like the suggestions made by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson. He sees spirituality as a major part of the transformational change that follows the disruption such as we have experienced. He suggests we take on the form of a pilgrimage as we go further into a new world. Breaking normal patterns and disrupting predictable expectations so that creative initiatives will have a chance to emerge characterizes life as a pilgrim. Imagination and experimentation are needed, as well as a contemplative pause. Specifically, he advises four attitude changes. First, take courage to walk away from our settled past and comfortable routines. Don't try to make a five-year plan. Secondly, surrender our need to control. Be resilient and attentive to the winds of change. Thirdly, slow down and open the space where deeper questions can emerge, avoiding perpetual distractions. Stop the constant flow of information, opinion, gossip and news. Finally, adopt an embodied faith - not just how we talk, think, hear but where we walk. We need to touch, sense, and partake of real presence. Relationships and physicality are in order.

To read the full article, look up "To Navigate Pandemic Life, Adopt a Pilgrimage Mindset" by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson in U.S. Catholic, August 12, 2021. I just hope it gets you thinking. If you have any further suggestions, let me know at joycet@glastonburyabbey.org It is September. Time to begin again!

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.