

Monastic Scribe LXXXVIII: April 11, 2025

FAITH AND HAVING ETERNAL LIGHT!

One of our previous lecturers at the abbey was Otis Moss, a Chicago pastor and preacher. He tells the delightful story of his five-year old daughter awakening him in the middle of the night. Going to the child's room he found her dancing without any lights on. Ready to tell her to go back to bed, he had the inspiration to try to comprehend what was going on. The externals of the room were in darkness, but her internal spirit was full of light. The Reverend Moss saw this as a metaphor of a believer in the world of evil. He went on to pen a book titled "Dancing in the Darkness." He realized that this was, and still is, a metaphor for the lives of all believers.

Many people today are confused, frightened, dismayed by the society around them. The tendency is to be against someone or something. But what are we for? We are in a swaying boat and don't know where we are going. Society has been thrown off its base and there is a lot of fear and confusion. Some believe that the President is making a new way for us. But money is still the persuasive ingredient. So many of us depend on technology and consumerism to tell us what we value and believe in. We accept the darkness and look for light. But the light is within.

My conviction, take it or leave it, is that we have lost the base of all reality, the force of the evolutionary world. I refer to the transcendent creator of all that is. Since our old images of God fail us, we have no divinity to give us a center. Humanistic secularism seems to be the sufficient course for our lives. The old Religion many have seems contrary to science, technology, and human life as we have come to understand it. It does not touch younger people in particular.

Christianity with which I am most acquainted, is polarized. One side of this divide embraces a political view of reality and their Christianity conforms to it. They confess to be Christians, may practice their religion regularly but their values come from the culture. Materialism, individualism, patriotism come before the gospel. There is a belief that we were once a Christian country (which Blacks, Jews and Catholics would have a difficult time understanding). Now some call for a Christian nationalism. Most are peaceful, caring people who may go to church but daily life is led by secular values. I do not doubt their sincerity but they are not demonstrating a Christ-like approach to the world we live in and the relation of God's Word to it. So many simply want to go back to the old church which demanded so little of them. Passivity and dependence on a priest were central.

Monastic Scribe LXXXVIII: April 11, 2025

Pope Francis, Archbishop Bartholomew, Jewish rabbis such as Abraham Joshua Heschel, have seen another form of religion. It requires a relational faith in God, and for Christians belief in Christ as their Way, his followers. They depend not only on what leaders may say but they study the Bible, want to learn deeper prayer through the mystics, feel the call of their baptism and confirmation to live the gospel – the prophets (Isaiah, etc.), Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7); what God expects of us (Matt. 25) and the very personal coming to know and follow Jesus that the gospel of John preaches. Religion is not enough. Real faith, even in the face of darkness, calls them. The individualism of so many people reduces their religion to me and God, being a good person, not hurting anybody. But the Bible, both in Old and New Testament, calls for care of one's neighbor, responsibility for the care of the earth and all who dwell on it. We are here on earth not just to be happy and comfortable but to care for each other, especially those most in need and those on the peripheries of society. Catholics, in particular, heed the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and Pope Francis who practices those teachings.

For those of us born before the mid-twentieth century, there is an internal shift requiring us to become concerned with the external chaos of life and bring the light within to shine in our daily lives. Respect for all people is a fundamental biblical value which requires care for the poor, for immigrants, for those of different races and ethnicities. Everyone can do something. Our local newspaper this week featured a former school teacher, now 91 years of age, going to a science center for children and explaining the world of animals and nature to them. He gets the message across that "life truly is not about me; I am about life." Americans are often like Calvinistic Puritans, living an individual austere life, but without the social covenant the Puritans professed for the care of others.

Is it a coincidence this year that Roman Easter, Orthodox Easter, and Jewish Passover are all falling in the same week? The world, humans and other sentient beings are all our neighbors. By appreciating the other religious traditions in our midst, we are honoring the same God, acknowledging the same humanity that we do, and showing that we truly care not just for our own back yard. Respect for every human person is the first of the Catholic social principles. The second is concern for the common good which sometimes surpasses individual goods. Our society right now blesses billionaires and allows the poor to survive on their own.

Monastic Scribe LXXXVIII: April 11, 2025

Each of us must start in our own lives, simplifying our lives, sharing our gifts. The strength for such a change is found in our intimate relationship to the Divine, a deep faith in the presence of our God even when life seems dark, confusing, chaotic. To avoid despair, cynicism, isolationism, we need to believe in something beyond us which calls us to live our lives more fully and deeply. This is a daily struggle in the face of the forces of our culture. But many people are waking to that struggle as being necessary to their humanity and their faith. Can you face this world with serenity and hope? You can write me at joycet@glastonburyabbey.org.

Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL

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.