

## DIVINE SYMBIOSIS

Most persons who have gone through grammar school, high school and beyond, have learned something about biology, whether they majored in it or not. It is in biology that the concept of symbiosis is to be found. Symbiosis is defined as the intimate living together of two different organisms for the mutual benefit of one another. Some examples will be helpful to get the total concept. Mistletoe, a green parasitic plant which grows on oak trees is found usually during the Christmas season when people hang it over a doorway and to give one the right to kiss whoever may be standing under it. Where or how that custom began is lost in history. In this example we have two very distinct types of plants, intimately living together (the mistletoe grows only on the oak tree sharing its life with the tree) but this relationship is not for the mutual benefit of one another. Ultimately the mistletoe will kill the oak. Another example could be two girl college graduates who are good friends and each has just been hired in a similar type of business, decide to share living a rented house together to save money as they begin their careers. Two different lives, living together for their mutual benefit, but not in any type of a real intimate relationship. This is not symbiosis.

An example of a true symbiotic relationship can be found in a certain type of heather plant which grows and thrives under very harsh conditions of little water, high temperatures, and very rocky soil. Within the plant in the roots, the stalk, the stems, the leaves, the flowers and even the seeds is a fungus which can only thrive and grow within the heather. And the heather can only grow and survive because of the fungus which somehow contributes to its life. This is a true symbiotic relationship.

In the Second Reading this Sunday taken from the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians he introduces the concept of the mystical body of Christ which is made up of all the members of His church. As he puts it, "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free person, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit." St. Paul then goes on to explain that the human body is not simply a single entity, but rather that it is made up of many parts, the feet, the arms, the hands, the eyes, the ears, etc. Each part functions by itself and yet is always coordinated with all the other parts to function as one distinct unity. No part can claim that it does not belong to the total body. Each part is totally different and functions totally by its nature, yet must always be united together with all the other parts to function as one whole person. And Paul clarifies this saying that "there may be no division in the body; if one part suffers, all parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy."

Then Paul states very emphatically: "You are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. And then he goes on to say: "Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds: gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work mighty deeds" do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues" Do all interpret?" What Paul is explaining is that every member of the Church, every true believer and follower of Christ, is different, yet intimately connected to each other to form one entity, the living body of Christ present in this world in his Church. Today we call this the mystical body of Christ. This implies that the Church which Christ founded is in fact a living organism, made up of all those who truly believe in Christ.

This unique doctrine of our Church should be something which every believer must not only understand but more importantly come to the conclusion that they are vital to the whole Church! Yes, each believer is essential to the well being of all believers. This is truly a symbiotic relationship, a divine symbiotic relationship chosen by God. What this means is that every single follower of Christ and believer in him has their God with them at all times. This is not just pious thinking; it is the reality. And furthermore, it also implies that each person and believer is essential to God for him to work in this world. We are not just part of a huge mob cheering on the Lord. We are all intimately connected to him and he to us; neither part can exist by itself. In the absolute, God has no need of anything outside of himself. He is totally self contained, dependent on nothing beyond him. However, God has chosen of his own free will to work with and through human beings in their world. He has chosen to make a firm commitment to humans never to desert them. He has chosen to have an intimate relation with each person. But at the same time, he respects the absolute freedom he has given to his creation. Each person has the power to say no to God and he will respect that right and their decision. Yet as any true lover, he will never give up trying to win a person back to his relationship with them. How this all works out in reality is and will always be a complete mystery. Yet it will also continue to be the reality.

So in the end, just where does all this leave each person who has chosen to be a part of God's plan in this present day world? The most important thing for one to always keep in mind is that God has chosen them individually to be not just a part, but to in fact be a very important part, a vital part perhaps in some cases. This concept in itself speaks volumes on how much God trusts his human creation. Seldom does God act through some spectacular manner. That is not his opus operandi. He much prefers to work behind the scenes and then watch and see how humans hopefully begin to see his hidden hand at work for their benefit. This takes practice but once one tries one can begin to see God's hand in this world in more ways than they can possibly imagine. And this should lead one to see something of God's whole plan and more importantly, begin to see just how each one by themselves fits in and how in reality God really does trust them individually.

None of this happens quickly or obviously. It takes time and practice for one to begin to get hints of God's presence. It takes at times a leap of faith. It always takes a total trust in God. And at times, more often than one cares to count, it involves discouragement and even the beginnings of some mistrust in God. One's impulsive reaction is to blame God for why something didn't work out, especially after one tried so hard to have faith and trust. But that is the human condition; it is not God's doing. So then where does this all lead? The simple and only answer is PRAYER! This does not mean Masses, rosaries, novenas, books of prayer etc. It means simply talking turkey with God saying it as it is in a very real sense, saying it as one sees it, and in the language one might just use with someone whom one trusts and feels let down. God knows all the words. Just as one once in a while has a bit of talking turkey with one's best friend, one must also do that with their Lord and God. This always clears the air, and if there was a real love relationship to begin with, it is almost always strengthened by saying it as one sees it. Thus, one's relationship with their God grows deeper and deeper and one begins to realize, he really does need them desperately, does trust them.

Fr. Andy, S.J.