

December 1, 2019

BORN IN HEAVEN!

BORN IN HEAVEN? A few days ago, I was visiting children at St Peter's School. I went to see first graders and second graders. I prayed with them for the healing of their classmate Naomi, the six-year old fighting a devastating brain tumor. Then I went to see the kindergarten class. Always a joy to be with the little ones. As I was leaving, I asked: "Does anyone know where I was born? If you are sure, raise your hand." Two or three hands went up and I asked the young boy in the front row. In an assured voice, he said: "YOU WERE BORN IN HEAVEN!" Though surprised, I immediately responded: "YOU ARE RIGHT: ALL OF US ARE BORN IN HEAVEN!" Yes! What an insight: our Creator and Father is in Heaven and so are we. To be in heaven is to be with God! We come from God and we return to God! Our souls are born in heaven. They are with God. Then their journey on earth is to return to be with the Father forever and ever in Heaven.

As you know, I am not a theologian nor a philosopher. I am a simple priest with a simple mind. However, I believe that God speaks to us in different ways at different times. Often, HE speaks to us through children. Little Children are pure and innocent. Some (not all) are like angels. They are close to God and we need to pay attention to what they say. I know that some children have changed the lives of their parents by asking simple questions, such as: "Dad and mom, why don't you get up and receive Jesus at Mass?" They may not know the Law of the Church (Canon Law) that says, "Married Catholics can receive the Eucharist only if they are married in the Catholic Church...and in a state of grace." However, this question may prompt their parents to get married by a Catholic priest (a civil marriage or one in a non-Catholic Church without the presence/blessing by a Catholic priest is not considered valid by the Catholic Church).

Can you recall having been touched by the words or actions of a child? Or do you recall when you were a child having asked some question that startled your parents or their friends? As children, we love to ask WHY? WHY? WHY? Many times adults find those why questions annoying but at other times they make us think...I am not saying that we should have a theological debate about whether or not we were born in Heaven. I am simply saying that to think about our own creation, our own birth may be helpful in our relationship with God. Yes, I believe that we all come from God and we are all created to go back to God. This is my faith. I cannot explain how this is possible.

However, IMAGES, ANALOGIES can help me to have a better understanding of God and of His presence in my daily life. Does it matter whether I was born in France, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Poland, or Germany? These are the most frequent guesses when people try to figure out the origin of my strong accent. It can be surprising that after 50 years of living in the United States, people still ask me "Where are you from?" Or "Where is your accent from?" These questions do not annoy me. On the contrary, they help me to enter into a conversation with a stranger I may encounter at Safeway, at the post office or in a train. That small talk may lead to deeper questions, including spiritual ones...and in some cases may help people to reconsider their relationship with God and lead them to change their way of life...

Sometimes, words or actions of a child can refresh our memories ... Not too long ago, on June 20, my classmates and I had a Mass of Thanksgiving on the occasion of our tenth anniversary of priesthood. It was held at St Phillip the Apostle in Camp Springs. Many of you were present and you may remember that my classmate Fr. Sass from Poland in the middle of his homily referred to his strong accent (still less strong than mine) and got a big laugh when he said that his response to people who ask him "where is your accent from?" is very simple: " MY ACCENT IS FROM HEAVEN !"

I have used many times as a reading at a funeral Mass or at the burial site a passage from St Paul's letter to the PHILIPPIANS (3:20): "But OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the LORD JESUS CHRIST." Yes, our citizenship is in Heaven— our baptism is the formal entry into Heaven. Let us pray that we all remain "good" citizens following the laws of Heaven! Let us pray that one day we will all be together again with our families and friends, reunited in Heaven.

May the Spirit of Advent enter into our hearts! Come Holy Spirit! Help us to anticipate the joy of Christmas into our daily lives! Come Holy Spirit! Help us to desire to RECONCILE with God as we prepare for the coming of our Lord Jesus!

One in Christ,
Father Alain