The Healing Gift of Wonder

In this issue of People of God, I would like to initiate a reflection with all Catholics throughout the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, as well as all women and men of faith. I do so, aware of the challenges confronting any public discourse today. How easy it is to close our ears to hearing one another. So, all I can ask is that you read and reflect upon these ideas. The theme of this series is this, "Mystery and the Moral Life". I know it is broad and challenging, but I believe with all my being that in order to grow positively through our present crisis in the Church we must recapture our sense of wonder and mystery about life, about God, about how we live, and about why we live. In short, we must see that Jesus Christ is working in our lives right now, even in the midst of woundedness, scandal and disappointment.

All great religions struggle in a special way with the fundamental questions of "Where do we come from?" and "Where do we go?" When you think about it, these questions really do require our religious engagement. Philosophy and science surely shed light on humanity's origins, but only religion enters these puzzling questions with wonder. What came before we each began to be? What comes after we have drawn our last breath? These are moments where we encounter mystery. Life itself, from its very first moment to its very last, invites us to wonderment. A child intuitively knows the mystery of wonder and as we draw near death we learn the lessons of a life so full of awe, and wonder and meaning. We must recall the mysteries of life are laden with wonder. And it is a dangerous thing when society loses its sense of wonder!

This is where we seem to be today. We have forgotten how to wonder. Again, if you watch a young child and reflect upon all their "firsts" you quickly realize their joy at discovery. Has our current social climate become so dead to wonder that we have lost our joy? Here in New Mexico, we deal constantly with poverty, addiction and violent crime. Yet, despite these very real problems, we must not allow them to blind us to the beauty of the land we inhabit, the richness of our cultural heritages and the awe inspiring sunsets that enchant us. It is so clear that as a society we need to re-discover wonder.

Jesus, as we see in the Gospels, was a "wonder worker" (Matthew 8:27, 9:33, 15:31; Mark 1:22, 2:12, 5:20, 6:51, 10:24; Luke 2:47, 4:22, 4:36, 8:56, 11:14; and John 5:28, 7:21). I believe that Jesus still is the best guide to our wonderment, but we have forgotten the novelty and extraordinary newness that Jesus brings time and time again. For example, in the busyness of Christmas do we forget to wonder in front of the manger that the very Son of God would be born for us in a lowly stable? Can we grasp the wonderment of the crowds when Jesus preached the coming of a kingdom where the last would be first, the downtrodden would be freed and the sick and lame would be cured? Do we fail to be amazed that the Good News would be preached not to the rich and powerful but rather to outcasts, prostitutes and tax collectors? Can we ever stop marveling that Jesus summed up all the commandments by calling us to love God and neighbor with all our being because after all else, God is love? Is it ever possible to lose our sense of awe and wonder that the ignominy of the cross could give way to eternal life? Truly, we must learn to wonder, to be made aware of the awe and beauty of all aspects of life. The mystery of life is a mix of many things and the greatest wonder is found in Jesus Christ, who out of love suffered and died that we might have life.

Soon we will celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14th. I have asked every parish to enter into the wonder of Christ's suffering and the healing of all who have suffered from the scandal of those who betrayed their sacred trust. That weekend as a people of faith we will

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together offer a Mass of Healing. The lesson of the cross teaches us that in the Crucified Christ we find redemption and God’s generous mercy. The harsh wood of the cross, as we see every Good Friday, is our means of entering into the Passion of the Lord, His suffering, wherein He has lovingly taken upon Himself all our suffering. The cross is a sign of restitution and reparation. The Roman means of capital punishment, of legal execution, has been transformed, in Christ, to the source of our redemption. The cross teaches us that our suffering is not without wonder, for in the cross we encounter God’s healing presence in the world. All of our suffering brothers and sisters know a mystery that is unique to each person. The wounds of so many cry out to God for His healing. The Exaltation of the Cross is a feast of God’s promise and pledge to heal a broken world. It is a transformation from a time of suffering into a time of joy. One of the solemn prayers on Good Friday reads: “Almighty, ever-living God, comfort of mourners, strength of all who toil, may the prayers of those who cry out in any tribulation come before You, that all may rejoice, because in their hour of need Your mercy was at hand.” The cross is for us a sign of faith that just as Christ has healed us so we as Church must always strive to be mercy in the midst of human suffering, and when we fail to do so, we must make amends. We must reach out to those so deeply wounded and we must prudently reform ourselves in the mystery and wonder of Christ crucified. For we know that the cross is also our means to salvation. As we celebrate the Exaltation of the Cross, it teaches us to become God’s compassion and mercy, to suffer with those in need. Faith calls us into the wonder of Christ’s cross and God’s promise. We trust in the Holy Spirit to guide us on this way of the cross, as we walk the rough and uneasy roads of life.

The mystery of this life lies beyond our sight, on that far horizon beyond our control. I wish to conclude with a passage from “A Prayer for Our Church” that will be part of the “Healing Mass” which reads: “We place our Church into Your hands, for without You, we can do nothing. May Jesus, our High Priest and true compass, continue to lead her in every thought and action – to be an instrument of justice, a source of consolation, a sacrament of unity, and a manifestation of Your faithful covenant. Amen.”

Sincerely yours in the Risen Lord,

Archbishop John C. Wester