

Harmony, Not Hatred

2nd Sunday of Advent (Year A)

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Society is obsessed with either/or thinking. Everything has to be yes or no, in or out, good or bad, black or white. This way of thinking gives us permission to take sides, approving of one side and hating the other. This is a very human way of thinking. But God's thoughts, we are told in scripture, are not our thoughts.

Whereas humans like to divide and take sides, God likes to hold opposites together and unite. God is much more comfortable with paradoxes, mysteries, and contradictions than we are. Without taking sides, God encompasses truth wherever it is to be found, without bias or prejudice. Contradictions are not threatening to God, but invitations for expanding God's embrace of all of reality. God seeks harmony, not hatred.

Our readings this weekend are about apparent opposites coming into harmony with each other.

In our first reading from the Prophet Isaiah, we heard, "on that day... the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together...the cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest...the baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair." While this doesn't make human sense, in some spiritual way it makes sense to God because as the prophet foretold, there will be a day when "there shall be no harm or ruin on all [God's] holy mountain."

In our second reading to the Romans, Paul also addresses an opposition: the opposition between Gentile and Jew. On a human level, this division makes sense, you are either one or the other. But Paul says, “may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Gentile or Jew doesn’t matter to God, so long as we are one in our praise of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, in our Gospel today we are presented with the contradictions between John the Baptist and Jesus. John was an unrefined man -wore camel’s hair and ate locusts- and baptized with water, whereas Jesus was more refined and baptized with the Holy Spirit. They seemed to have different characteristics and personalities on a human level. But from God’s perspective, both John and Jesus were vital to proclaiming the coming of the same kingdom.

Perhaps the reason we humans so often divide, oppose, and hate is that we are not patient enough to see the bigger picture. Advent is good time to work on our patience.

God seeks harmony among opposites.

Am I contributing to the current state of division and hatred in our society with my either/or thinking?

Christianity offers us an alternative way of living. We do not have to take sides, tie ourselves down to one political party, or be afraid of opposites. Instead, like God, let us try to expand our embrace so that we may harmonize all things and not hate nothing.