

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who chose us before the foundation of the world**
(Ephesians 1:3-10)

The Spirit of Wisdom in Celtic and Native American Spiritualities

Last week, we looked at three levels of identity: that of “*Boundaries*” which is about my identity, who I am - “who’s in / who’s out”; that of the “*Prophetic*” which is about trying to make matters way they should be, about helping others; and that of “*Wisdom*” which is about God infusing everything with God’s own Self leading to a deeper, broader, more inclusive way of loving all things. These levels of identity are found in all cultures and religious traditions. I would like to consider today with you how the life of “*Wisdom*” is found in different religious traditions, specifically the Celtic and Native American spiritualities.

The life of Wisdom among Celts in Scotland and Ireland

Since the Romans never occupied Ireland or parts of Scotland, the Christian monks there thrived independently, uncontrolled by Roman practicality or Greek thought. Celtic Christianity was grounded in the natural world. It had an easy access to a cosmic notion of the Christ. It saw God as a deep kind of listening and speaking presence, an “*anam cara*,” a soul friend much more attentive than an offended deity who is “*making a list, checking it twice, going to find out who's naughty or nice.*” Experiencing God as living and moving through all things is the blessing of Wisdom among Celts in Scotland and Ireland.

The life of Wisdom among Native American tribes

In Native American spiritualities, the Earth and all its inhabitants belong to the Creator who made them. We are to live in harmony with each other and all created things. When Pope John Paul II met with the Native Americans in Phoenix, Arizona, he told them that they knew something that is taking Catholics a long time to learn: that the Great Spirit has always been given and is available in the natural world, just as it is written in our own Scriptures (Romans 1:20). Experiencing God living and moving through all things is the blessing of Wisdom among the Native American spiritualities.

Celtic and Native traditions with Nature

Both Celtic and Native traditions receive inspiration and wisdom from nature, beauty, and signs and symbols. Because they are not tied to one sacred text, they are free to discover and honor the sacred everywhere. The natural world is benevolent, despite its inherent violence and changeability. This view leads to very different values than a worldview that begins with a theological or moral problem “to be solved.” Experiencing God as infusing everything is the blessing of Wisdom among Celtic and Native American spiritualities.

Celtic and Native spirituality both started with some kind of "original blessing" instead of an "original sin," which was coined by Augustine in the fourth century. His contemporary, British monk and theologian, Pelagius, focused instead on "original blessing" and the individual's ability, through grace, to grow into fullness. The Church since the fourth century has largely followed Augustine's doctrine on original sin which sees Jesus primarily as a problem-solver rather than as a revealer of the very heart and image of God (Colossians 1:15f). A deeper, broader, more inclusive way of loving is the blessing of Wisdom.

Blessings of Celtic and Native traditions

Huston Smith describes "primal peoples" as oriented to a single cosmos, which sustains them like a living womb. Because they assume that it exists to nurture them, they have no disposition to challenge it, defy it, refashion it, or escape from it. Primal peoples are concerned with the maintenance of personal, social, and cosmic harmony, but the overriding goal of "salvation" in historical religions is virtually absent from them. They are not concerned with salvation as a way of escaping from a sinful world and go to heaven or the next world. They believe that we are not here simply as transients waiting for a ticket to somewhere else. A deeper, broader, more inclusive way of loving is the blessing of Wisdom among primal peoples.

Black Elk, an Oglala holy man, describes how for many Native Americans, the circle symbolizes this interconnectedness of all things. *"Everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation, and so long as the hoop was unbroken, the people flourished. The flowering tree was the living center of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it. The east gave peace and light, the south gave warmth, the west gave rain, and the north with its cold and mighty wind gave strength and endurance."*

"The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Our tepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children. But the Wasichus [white men] have put us in these square boxes. Our power is gone and we are dying, for the power is not in us any more." Seeing God as infusing everything and sharing in the joy of a deeper, broader, more inclusive way of loving is the blessing of Wisdom.

Christianity has this depth of Wisdom

Certainly Celtic and Native American spiritualities reflect a life of Wisdom in their traditions. Certainly, following the way of Christ reveals the life of Infinite Wisdom in our tradition. At their core, all major spiritual traditions have a common center - the oneness of all beings. It's just that organized religion tends to see sin and punishment first in this life, and then spends time devising ways to be saved from it.

Jesus is the heart of Perfect Wisdom

Jesus is the heart of Perfect Wisdom whose message is love, that there is no power in fear that is greater, that we are loved by his Father so completely as to be fully one with him. It is the fullness and perfection of Wisdom to recognize bigotry masking itself as morality. It is the fullness and perfection of Wisdom to realize that we are not just seeking to be in harmony with creation, we already are. It is the fullness and perfection of Wisdom to discover when we are no longer seeking God in all things, we are celebrating it.

So, Happy Spirit of Wisdom, everyone!