

December 3, 2017
1st Sunday of Advent

Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

*Advent isn't about thinking our way into a new way of acting;
Advent is about acting our way into a new way of thinking*

History

The practice of Advent traces its roots back to the 12th century. It has carried different meanings since then, referring to different comings of Christ. Today, Advent generally refers to preparing for Christmas.

A deeper understanding of Advent is that it is a time of preparation for the full coming of Christ, which we call Easter. Such preparation fosters a fundamental widening of consciousness in our faith and religious beliefs. We see such a change beginning to happen throughout Christianity today. Looking at these changes is the point of this homily today.

Emerging Consciousness in Christianity

Ken Wilber, of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, writes, "We are seeing in Christianity today a revolutionary change in consciousness itself. This emerging consciousness is happening on all continents, in all denominations, at all levels—and at a rather quick pace." The following are some of the ways we see this happening.

1. We are seeing a global sense of Christianity reframing denominational divisions. Many of the things we historically fought about are resolved, boring, or non-essential.
2. We are seeing a growing recognition of the unnecessary limits that church protocols and historical idiosyncrasies have put on living the Gospels for each of our denominations.
3. We are seeing a developing spirituality and theology of nonviolence that allows us to move beyond the old fight-or-flight dualism.
4. We are seeing a new appreciation for the many gifts of the laity for ministry instead of only a top tiered ordained leadership."

Ken says, "These are more than mere church structural or organizational re-arrangement. It is a moving toward a way of following Jesus that has much more to do with lifestyle than with belief." This radical transformation in our Christian consciousness isn't just happening within our ourselves, it is also transforming the Church itself.

Emerging Consciousness in Religious Life

We are seeing in Christianity today a revolutionary change in Religious Life. An article in the Global Sisters Report, November 27, 200107, explains this well. It says in part:

"Benedictine Oblates stand at an important crossroads in history. Lay Oblates, or secular associates of religious orders, currently outnumber monks and sisters. This development marks both a historic opportunity and a significant challenge. To continue the nearly 1600-year-old Benedictine tradition, lay associates of monasteries will need to play an increasingly critical role in transmitting that tradition.

"Oblates (lay associates) come from all walks of life. They are men and women, married and single, laypeople and vowed religious, working and not, Catholic and not. Though they live in the secular world, Oblates form strong bonds with particular orders.

"Oblates have been described as 'co-workers,' 'partners' and 'friends' of the Benedictine order. Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day was an Oblate. **Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister** says about the unfolding role of Oblates. *'You are not meant to simply be consumers of the Benedictine tradition. You are meant to be carriers of the tradition. You are the future of Benedictine Order.'*"

Is there an emerging consciousness happening with ourselves?

1. Are we *moving away* from religious argumentative "either/or" thinking which incessantly judges and compares and measures and competes, which decides who's right and who's wrong, who's in and who's out, who's to be saved and who's to be condemned in our community, our nation, our world?
2. Or are we *moving towards* seeing everyone on earth as family, that we are all in need of healing, that we are all a cry for help, that we all save each other because we belong to each other.

Brian McLaren, in his book, "The Great Spiritual Migration," asks, 'Could it be that now is the time, at long last, for Christians to migrate to the vision shared by its original founder and his original followers? If Christian faith can be redefined in this way, if our prime contribution to humanity can be shifted from teaching correct beliefs to practicing the way of love as Jesus taught, then our whole understanding and experience of the church (and world) could be transformed . . . [into] a school of love.' I'm not saying this kind of radical transformation should be happening in Christianity. I am saying it is happening, even in the Vatican.

Where is this transformation taking us? To act as Jesus did: "Be forgiving of life - all life including all that oppose us, not hating or denying anything or anybody, not rejecting anyone who is different from ourselves." Doing this helps us begin to see ourselves and others in a new way, in a more forgiving way, in a more loving way. And we will suddenly discover what it means to be saved, not later, but now - right here in Rockaway.

Advent is about the evolution of Christian consciousness
Advent is about the evolution of Christianity itself

The evolution of Christian consciousness isn't just hopeful, it is inevitable.

Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved

*We don't think our way into this new way of acting;
we act our way into this new way of thinking.*

Happy Advent Everyone!