

September 9, 2015
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

If you say, “*Go in peace, keep warm and eat well,*” but do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is that? Faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

It is only when our inner world is at peace can we do the Works of Faith

Faith and Good Works

The “Faith versus Good Works” controversy has been bubbling since the early 16th century. Martin Luther, when failing to help reform some of the corrupt practices of the Catholic Church, left it to teach that salvation comes from Faith without good works, and that scripture alone is our guide. This shaped a controversy until the late 1970’s at which time both the Lutherans and Catholics decided that there really wasn’t any disagreement after all.

Buddhist and Christian Practices

Paul Knitter, a theologian from Cincinnati, in his book “Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian,” states that Buddhism offers practices that help Christians get in touch with the inner mystical elements of their Faith that are the expression and embodiment of God. Buddhists seek peace to live justly; Christians seek justice to live in peace. Both find justice and peace, each from a different direction. One can come to St. Mary Church from either the north or the south.

We are familiar with the Christian approach of finding peace through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. We are not so familiar with the Buddhist approach to find peace through sitting. Why do they do this? How does this help find peace? Let us look at this, hopefully without it becoming too academic.

The Removal of Ego’s big Needs

Buddhists do “sitting” to remove the needs of the weak, unhealthy self with its big “Ego-needs” which inhibit peace by: *being defensive, fearful, rigid, need to be right, protective of self, and usually begin with a NO before a YES*, and so on. These turn: *political debate into political blame, social service into social advantage, and economic security into economic privilege.*

The strong, healthy self with its small “Ego-needs” promote instead peace by: *not being defensive, flexible, open-minded, forgiving, not protective of self, and usually begin with YES before No.* These turn: *indifference into compassion, anger into forgiveness, and hatred into love.*

Pope Francis is a good example of someone who has few Ego-needs. He moves about not seeking privilege and position, but instead greeting people out of love, compassion and mercy. The Buddhist practice of “*sitting*” helps remove the unhealthy, small self. Their teaching is that: “*there is no peace out there if no peace - in here.*”

Not always Easy

Sometimes “sitting” and “doing the works of Faith” are easy, as when we sit before the awesome beauty of a sunset, or participate in the hospitality and love of a parish community like St. Mary.

At other times, “sitting” and “doing the works of Faith” are not easy, as when we are confronted by anger and hate. I remember going down to the Los Angeles Education Congress in Anaheim, and there would be these protesters holding up their signs and shouting that Catholics are all going to hell - and worse. I mean, they were in our face. And there would be people attending the Congress standing there and shouting back pretty much the same message about them. It was awful.

The question is, what would have been a faith-filled and peaceful response to such behavior? For help, we can look at the Gospels and see how Jesus responded to the hate and anger of his enemies. On the Cross, he said, “*Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.*” Mary stood at the foot of the Cross in support of her son. We respond as effectively as we can do darkness and evil, but without the hate and anger directed at us, which simply makes us like them.

SHARING:

What examples do you have from the Gospels that model for you peace of heart and good works in the face of resistance and threat?

When we remove the obstacles to peace by performing good works, we will no longer be working for peace, we will be celebrating it.

It might be a good idea if we “sit” with this for a while