
COMMUNITY



The Christian faith remains ever a commitment to a *Person*. Without the Person, there is no faith. The core of the faith thus lies in the heart of a Person—the self-emptying God-Man who is the second Person of the Holy Trinity. Only from the living mystery of this Person do we derive the creed we hold dear. The faith has no substance without the *relationship* to which *personhood* calls us. This Person is he who bears the name of Jesus; He who is the Christ.

The Call to Communion

Among all the mysteries to which the heart of Jesus draws us, the mystery of *being in relationship* remains as a singular, interwoven thread. Christ calls us to relationship. This is the heart of the call to communion, the call to the banquet of life. Christ, as lover, redeemer, and mediator between man and God, yearns to introduce us to the fullness of life's meaning. He longs to show us that the glory of God is a man fully alive. We are not meant to lead mediocre lives. We are not meant to offer a distorted sacrifice of being less than ourselves. Through a relationship with Jesus, we uplift our

THE MYSTERY OF GOD WHO COMES DISGUISED AS OTHERS IN OUR LIVES

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physical humanity by divinizing the soul. Communion with Jesus imbues us with divinity.

We cannot do this on our own. We need an authentic relationship with “other” to become one in Christ. We need to enter into a radical and unrepeatable relationship with Christ in Himself and those He puts in our life or we will never quicken in our barren wombs. Ever hungry to show us our greatness, Jesus waits, never giving up on us, pursuing insistently as the Hound of Heaven. Alone we merely bide the time. Through Jesus, we come alive to the presence of God in “other.” Alone our knowledge is limited by the boundaries of self. In Jesus, we experience the mystery of being in communion with God Himself whether we are by ourselves with God in church or whether united with Him in human relationships.

The Divine Invitation

A relationship with Jesus teaches that there can never be community without communion. There can never be a marriage without a gift and response. There can never be a friendship without some true presentation of self and some unqualified reception of other. In the model of Jesus, we risk everything to enter into unswerving relationship. We share and receive as Jesus does. As an eager lover or earnest friend, Jesus longs to share all that he has—all the

riches of His Kingdom. If we allow him, Jesus holds tight to our hand leading us to unparalleled mysteries of joy beyond human imagining. We come to know the ardent longing and protective tenderness of the Father. We experience the sweet consolation and life-changing gifts of the Holy Spirit. We receive the ineffable warmth of Our Lady's loving embrace as a Mother who never fails to be there for us. We learn from the mysteries of those very real everyday people of flesh and blood who became saints in the kingdom of God. We begin to understand that the Kingdom is not remote; it is here and now.

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In such a *community* of faith, the Christian knows that conversion of heart, mind, body, or soul cannot take place outside of relationship. Isolation breeds naught but isolation. Relationships, muddy as they may be at times, breed communion. Even an angry relationship holds the seed of communion; yet, a life lived in self-sufficiency shrinks the bleeding heart dry. We are made to be completed in “other.” Yet any hope of entering into relationship remains a futile dream unless we open to the mystery that is within each unrepeatable person. Christians know this mystery to be the person of Jesus. Yet even the searching soul who does not yet know Jesus can attain to relationship provided the soul but opens to the mystery that abides in each person. We need only crack the door. God will find a way in.

The Pharisees were too self-sufficient to give an inch. Utterly self-focused, they could not see the God who walked among them. In their rejection of an authentic relationship with the person of Jesus, they rejected communion with God. We do this to ourselves. We become mulish and inflexible. Hardness of heart blinds the vision all the while we “know” we are right. As we dig in our heels, we fashion a grave for heart of relationship.

Human Responses

In an example we find hard to follow, Christ takes no freedom unless it is given unreservedly. He forces nothing. He manipulates not at all. Our Lord’s paradigm of being in relationship is simply one that gives freely of self and receives other unconditionally. This divine example lived so beautifully within the communion of the three Persons of Holy Trinity remains difficult for us. We like to demand and force love

according to our schedules. Our wound from original sin leaves us with this prideful tendency to swing between meddling and being autonomous. So we either shun others or we maneuver them like pieces in a puzzle. Yet the puzzle is not of human fashioning; we grow frustrated trying to fit jagged pieces into smooth holes. Only God can do that for us.

Relationships can be scary. We have to let our guard down to other flawed humans. We have to admit we need people to enter into the communion of community. Instead we pretend to be independent. We give in to a distrust of others. We allow ourselves to be skeptical about entering into relationship lest we lose something of ourselves. There is too much of the unknown. So we seek what is known and familiar even, at times, when the known and familiar is ugly, abusive, or lonely. We cannot see that the very search for safety keeps us in the far more precarious position of losing our very humanity. We were never meant to function alone, on some sort of auto pilot. We were designed to refuel and soar in and through relationships. To enter into mystery, we must be game for a flight path that may be unfamiliar. We must open to the unexpected adventure of exploring Christ in others.

Jesus longs to tell us that relationships rooted in divine mystery open our hearts to unexpected abundance. True giving is rooted in a divine



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generosity and wisdom. The pseudo gift of self entails the fawning gift of a flatterer who merely tries to buy love or to make of himself a needed rescuer. Love in the example of Jesus offers the unreserved gift of self just as it beckons unconditionally to receive other no matter how poor, how stupid, how limited. This is the heart of a relationship rooted in the mystery of Christ. The more we open ourselves to such mystery in our relationships, the more we will receive. Such is God’s promise. We lose nothing of ourselves in authentic relationships; rather, we gain, we grow, we increase, we uncover the truest part of ourselves. All that decreases is the sham of who we thought we were. Finally we can drop the façade of a life lived in pretense or secretiveness.

Therefore, in future issue this column will explore how to build the community of God—one relationship at a time.

