

Treasure

These are days when more than a few of us are reluctant to get out of bed for fear of what the next headline will bring.

There are mass uprisings throughout the world, particularly these days among our brothers and sisters in Hong Kong.

There are mass shootings here at home, 251 of them this year alone, which is more than the number of days that have passed.

The horrors of last weekend in Dayton and El Paso cry out for a response that is something more than thoughts and prayers.

Meanwhile, fascist rhetoric heats up among some of the most powerful leaders in the world, as closer to home we ordinary people struggle to find a way forward supporting the sovereign rights of the Hawaiian people in the struggle for Mauna Kea.

In the midst of so much fear and uncertainty, what an appropriate time to sit with Jesus and remember the treasure that we all possess.

It is a treasure that can and will transform not only each and every one of us, but it is a treasure profound enough to change the world.

It is said that if you want to see God, look into the eyes of a small child.

I'll never forget the day right here at our baptismal font, when I had the great privilege of baptizing little Cassie Davis.

As I anointed her with the chrism oil (“you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever”), I could see the whole universe in her eyes.

It was a remarkable, mystical moment right here, on an ordinary Sunday.

Ironically, it is also during childhood that we often lose track of the great treasure with which we are all born.

Insecurity, the death or absence of parents, the neurosis of adults, all can have so many of us take the treasure with which we are born and lock it up tight into some kind of interior vault.

Which leads so many of us to spend a lifetime seeking other treasures.

Those more tangible treasures of wealth or fame or power or control or shopping, the list is, of course, endless.

But the only way to our true self is to rediscover our true treasure.

How can we do that?

Listen for a bit to what Beatrice Bruteau has to say:

“A ‘better’ world is one in which we recognize that all people possess an incomparable value that we are morally obliged to respect . . . in social, political, and economic terms.

Honoring the humanity of your fellow beings means that if they are hungry, ill, or oppressed, you must exert yourself to help them. . . .

But this . . . runs up against our basic instincts of self-protection, greed, and desire to dominate others. . . .

If we could only rearrange our internal energy — if we more often nurtured our companions and promoted their well-being, we would suffer much less.

And the very thing that rearranges this energy is something called mysticism.

Consider that domination, greed, cruelty, violence, and all of our other ills, come from feelings of insecurity, of not being or having, 'enough.'

I need more power, more possessions, more respect, more admiration.

But it's never enough; the fear is always there.

And fear comes from everywhere: from other people; from economic circumstances; from ideas, customs, and beliefs; from the natural environment; from our own bodies and minds.

To the extent we are not mystics, this is our experience.

But, fortunately, you are mystics!

And because you are mystics, you know that in the place where our true treasure sits, we are not strangers to each other.

In talking with one another, in sharing experiences, in teaching and encouraging one another we are helping each other know that we are deeply related, that we are all precious and deserving, that the universe is our home, that we can feel safe at the deepest level of our being." Id.

It's what Tom Merton saw that day, "in Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers.

This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud...

I have the immense joy of being human, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate.

As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are.

And if only everybody could realize this!

But it cannot be explained.

There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."

So many of you sitting here this morning know exactly this!

From my old friend Gigi whose Makaha farm has shaped the lives of literally thousands of youngsters from across the island to Leisl and Kerry who have devoted their lives to our little ones in the classroom, from our Catholic Workers over there in Wallyhouse to the many "below the radar" kindnesses that so many of you undertake, you are all a "witness to the oneness that is the hallmark of the mystic.

And yet, it goes beyond individuals.

The truth is, mutual support and respect is the only possible foundation for a free, just, equal, and responsible society, and the roots of that support and respect grow directly out of the mystical experience.

When I no longer need to promote myself—or my nation, tradition, or religion—by putting down others, a fantastic release of energy happens, because the energy that I used to depend on, to protect and defend, is now just waiting to be used in caring for and rejoicing with others.”
Beatrice Bruteau, paraphrased.

Because while we each of us know “a truth,” none of us possess “the truth.”

So it's long past time to recognize that “all great religions have similar origins: each is rooted in the spiritual awakening of its founder to God, to the divine, the absolute, to the boundless awareness.

That awakening is found in the rishis of India; the Buddha in his enlightenment; in Moses, the patriarchs, the prophets, and the other holy souls of the bible.

It is there in Jesus' inner realization of his relationship with his Father, who is also our Father.

And it is there in Mohammed's encounter with Allah, through the Archangel Gabriel.

Everything that matters arises from mysticism, this primary religious experience.

And while organized religion is helpful, with its forms and rituals, we hunger for that direct contact with the divine, that nose to nose encounter, with ultimate mystery.

Religion carries the tradition within a community, but religion is too often afraid of the breath of the spirit, which blows where it will.

Which is why most religions, Christian, Jewish and Muslim, barely mention the mystical life.

The religious life of the faithful tends to remain at the corporate, devotional level, while the contemplative and mystical are too often neglected.

But inward change, metanoia, entering into the larger mind that Christ calls us to, is our greatest single resource for changing our centuries-old love affair with violence and division.

Transformation happens only when we surrender to the mystery in which 'we live and move and have our being.'" Id., paraphrased.

Hearts can change the structures we create — and the structures we create also change hearts.

Changing both: hearts and social structures, that's how genuine, lasting reform happens.

"And so we need to understand, to really grasp at a very basic level, that the real revolution, the revolution for which the whole of creation is groaning, is the spiritual awakening of humankind." Id., paraphrased.

As one mystic came to see:

"Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for the second time in the history of the world, humanity will have discovered fire." P. Teilhard de Chardin.

We are living in difficult times, the headlines are often frightening.

But if we can rediscover our inner treasure, and encounter one another with the eyes of that treasure, perhaps then, the headlines will change...

+amen.