

“I am the vine, you are the branches; abide in me and you will bear much fruit.” John 15:5

Vine & Branches

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Weekly Edition
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The Holy Ordinary



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Back in the 1970's the movie Oh God!, starring the old curmudgeon George Burns as God and folk singer John Denver as his new Moses, was a big hit.

Only John Denver could see “God”, and God had a lot to say to we modern humans. During the film, a bunch of religious scholars decided to test whether John Denver was just nuts, or whether he was really having some kind of divine experience.

So they put him all alone in a securely locked hotel room and handed him a bunch of tricky theological questions to answer. Naturally God shows up and answers them. And the question that got the most attention from many of us was this: Is Jesus the Son of God?

To which George Burns, as God, replies: “Jesus is my son.” And you could hear the soft exhaling of agreement among the believers in the theatre. But then God says: “And Moses is my son. And Mohammed. And so's that butcher down the street who sold you that overpriced piece of steak you're eating.”

At which point the conniptions began! For Christians, the place that Jesus holds is special and different from the place every other person holds.

In just a few moments, we shall recite the Nicene Creed, reaffirming that we believe Jesus is not only fully human, but that he is fully divine too.

For non-Christians, our belief that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine is often a big roadblock. Non-Christians see him as a magnificent human being. A wise teacher. A prophet and a martyr. But not divine.

So imagine my surprise as I read yet again the beautiful insights of Julian of Norwich just the other day. You know her!

She's the first woman author in Europe, having written of her long mystical experiences in a book entitled “Showings.” For years, she lived alone in a small room attached to a church, and there, experienced the depths of God's mysteries.

And what she came to understand is that “‘there is nothing separating divinity from humanity.’ But she doesn't stop there!

Then she says something quite radical indeed. That there is nothing separating anyone from Christ, since human nature ‘is so completely entwined with Christ's nature.

That our true essence can never be separated from his.’ And she's still not done. She then says: God sees us as other Christs because ‘God's love for humanity is so vast that he makes no distinction between the blessed Christ and the least soul among us.’” Fox, Julian of Norwich at 62, quoting Showings, 138, 146, 149.

Precisely the point George Burns, as God, made when he equates Jesus with not only Moses and Mohammed, but with the over priced butcher down the street as well!

It's not that holy Jesus is deemed to be ordinary by God. It's that everything that we say is ordinary — is in fact holy!

Science itself points to the magnificent wonder of who we are and where we come from.

Did you know that “sixty percent of the trillions upon trillions of atoms in each human body was birthed in the big bang 13.8 billion years ago?

Or that the remaining elements of our bodies were birthed in a supernova explosion maybe 5 billion years ago.

Meaning, our bodies are cosmic bodies. Our bodies link us to our past. To our human ancestors through our DNA.

But also to our big bang and galactic and supernova ancestors! Including hydrogen, helium, carbon, magnesium, oxygen, sulphur, and much more.” Fox, id., at 76, modified.

And if we listen carefully to today’s readings, this is exactly where we are being led.

To that place where the truth of our condition is found. As the holy becomes ordinary. So that the ordinary may become holy.

John’s entire gospel wrestles with this mind-numbing news. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...”

“The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us.” “For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son...” The holy — becomes ordinary!

And then, again from John’s Gospel: “When I am lifted up, I shall drag the whole world to myself.”

“That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

As the ordinary — becomes holy! John’s constant refrain is that here -- in the very midst of our blood, sweat and tears -- IS the holiness of God. And what are the ramifications?

Well, if the holy becomes ordinary, then nothing is really ordinary anymore.

If the holy becomes ordinary, what is ordinary, like you and me and everyone else on this planet; like the earth and its treasures, like the animals and oceans, is also holy.

And the distance that we thought kept us safe from the holy, why, it vanishes!

Because in truth the holy is in our midst. Suffused in everything we see. Everyone we touch. In every bit of creation.

This is the great convulsion that Jesus brings. No wonder we kill him with such relish.

Because -- if the ordinary is holy, whom can we hate? Whom can we refuse to forgive? Whom can we kill? If the ordinary is holy, how can we separate lives lived on Sunday morning from lives lived the rest of the week?

And I wonder if this is what Jesus is getting at when he tells us today that “whoever believes has eternal life.”

Not “whoever believes will have eternal life,” but “whoever believes has eternal life.” Now. Today.

This moment! If you can see everything around you as holy; from the wino at the bus stop, to our glorious Tiffany stained glass, to the gal seated in front of you, to the jerk who cut you off in traffic this morning, to the cows in the field; if you can come to believe that all of it is overflowing with God; then you have stepped through the doorway — into eternal life.

It’s a narrow doorway to be sure! Because our ego insists that the holy is far away and out of touch. How else to ensure that I remain the center of the universe?

So that I can say: “This is mine!” “This I deserve!” That’s the ego talking. Because the ego demands that the holy stay far away.

Our egos prefer to keep the doorway to eternal life forever in the next world, that I may or may not see someday, but only once I’m dead.

But if you ask for the grace, that narrow passage just might open right in front of your eyes.

As Merton says: “For those with eyes to see, heaven’s gate — is everywhere!”

Or as the blessed saint puts it: “All the way to heaven is heaven, because Jesus says: ‘I am the way!’” St. Catherine of Siena.

Simone Weil once remarked that the “tragedy of Christianity is that it came to see itself as replacing other religions — instead of adding something to all of them.” What Christianity adds to all other faiths is this simple truth.

The holy has become ordinary, thus making all things, all people, holy. Paul is given the grace to see the holy suffused in every ordinary thing.

That vision propels his entire ministry. It’s the source of his patient advice given to us today.

Be “kind to one another. Tenderhearted. Forgiving. As God through Christ has forgiven you.”

Isn’t this is the way of God? Not vengeance or punishment. But gentleness. Tenderness. And yes, a really good laugh!

In that gentleness, in that tenderness, and yes, in that wonderful sense of humor, is the true power that sustains all that is.

In Jesus, the holy becomes ordinary flesh. Flesh, for your belly and mine. For in that flesh, is the life of the world!

+amen

Quoteable Quotes from Notable Folks

AT THE END OF YOUR LIFE,
THIS WORLD WILL EITHER BE
A MORE OR LESS LOVING,
COMPASSIONATE, CARING
PLACE BECAUSE OF YOUR
PRESENCE.
YOUR MOVE.

johnpavlovitz.com

Christian mystics speak of the
life of Christ growing within
them to such an extent that
they can say it is not I that sees;
but Christ sees through my
eyes; He listens through my
ears; He speaks through my lips;
He blesses with my hands; He
loves through my heart.

NewEdenMinistry.com

Christian mysticism is not a
looking at Christ and an
imitation of Him, but a
transformation into Christ.

William Johnston



No being will remain outside
the number of the saved.

SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA

Peace is not something
to hope for in the future.
Peace is something
that we can be
in every moment.
If we want peace,
we have to be peace.
Peace is a practice
and not a hope.

- Thich Nhat Hanh
Thich Nhat Hanh gems





THEN AND



NOW

SHIM HALL REBOOT