

HOPE AND LIGHT, SESSION TWO

Welcome back. In our previous session I quoted the Mad Hatter, “How you get there is where you will arrive.” At the start of this session I want to quote an old missionary whom I served with in Africa. When I was working furiously to put everything in order before I was to leave on my first home leave an old Brother told me, “How you leave is where you will arrive.” He saw my panic to finish up stuff and suggested that I not stay in panic mode up to the point of departure. Instead, he said, take a two-day quiet retreat before getting on the plane. Because, he repeated, “How you leave, is where you will arrive.”

We are leaving the Twenty Teens and entering the Twenty Twenties. This little retreat today, these quiet few hours, are a healthy and wise way to leave the turbulent adolescence of this century. “How you leave is where you will arrive.”

This afternoon as we leave a decade, this afternoon as we are about to enter the Twenty Twenties, we are using the 20 Mysteries of the Rosary to give us 20/20 vision into the future. How so?

Consider that by adding the five Mysteries of Light Pope John Paul 11 has given us a recipe for the 21st century. When we had 15 Mysteries: five for joy, five for sorrow, five for glory, that recipe made life-pie with two thirds rejoicing and one third suffering. Now the recipe calls for Three Quarters rejoicing, one quarter suffering, but suffering in a Marian sense: a sword must pierce your heart; without vulnerability, without the wounds of love, glory cannot constellate.

In Kenya, where Homo Sapiens first appeared in the Rift Valley, Prof. Leakey Senior made the topic of evolution much discussed even among ordinary people. We used to hear that evolution works by survival of the fittest, by combat with other species, by struggle and suffering. As a pacifist and an optimist I never believed that could be the whole story. And in my novel about Nairobi I gave a Marian theory of evolution, based on the findings of Leakey Jr., Philip Leakey.

Using Philip’s discoveries, I wrote: “If we can get beyond ‘the survival of the fittest, first tool of man was a weapon, perspective of evolution’, and look more closely at women’s role in evolution, then we see that human evolution required not only courage but imagination and a sense of humor. To illustrate what I am talking about let’s look at First Eve and Second Eve.

“For thousands and thousands of years first Eve chose a standing-up mate. She was bold and innovative, for indeed she was making a funny choice. Those first Eves chose males who related well and cooperated well. According to the fossil records these males brought home the meat of animals killed in their hunting expeditions, because their arms were free to carry things. And, they probably didn’t just carry things but also carried their children; so the female homo erectus kept choosing mates who were both bread-winners and caregivers to the children.

“Saying ‘Yes’ to the most Christ-like, clownish males, pushed the course of our evolution forward until the leap from Homo Erectus to Homo Sapiens took place. But it took courage for all those females, over the millennia, to keep saying ‘Yes’ to the less ape-like males. The Stalwarts of Ape Society must have disapproved of their choice. For those females to keep mating with the gentle, funny-looking males, was seen as very irregular, abnormal, and unnatural for Ape Society.

“Let’ zoom ahead to Second Eve, Mary of Nazareth. She said ‘Yes’ to an angel’s request to complete the human project started by all those First Eves. She said ‘Yes’ to the fullness of humanity, the Omega Point of human evolution, Jesus Christ. And indeed, the Stalwarts of Palestinian Society disapproved of her and her Holy Child.

“And what about us today, in 2019? To move the whole human race toward that Omega Point, we have to keep choosing to be foolish, funny-acting, jester-like, kind, gentle sons and daughters of Mary.

The social forms we say ‘Yes’ to in the new century, might also be scary. But these ‘cultural mutations/holy innovations’ will move our species forward. And so we too must be brave, imaginative, and keep a sense of humor when the Stalwarts of Society tell us that these new social forms are dangerous, irregular, abnormal.”

All Saints parish is a good example of a dangerous innovative social form. We are witnessing here something magical, an alchemy, not a melting pot, but an alchemical process through which each element is being brought to full personhood by our holy communion.

I have been discussing Big Picture Hopes – such as human evolution over the last million years; so it's time to make our discussions on hope a bit more personal.

“How you leave, is where you will arrive.” Everyone here, at some point, will be leaving the stage of life you presently occupy. Some will be leaving early adulthood to enter midlife; some will be leaving midlife to enter elder-hood. How you leave is where you will arrive.

Will we leave our stage with hope? What is our attitude to hope? In the first session I mentioned three theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Love. Usually we speak well of people in whom we see faith and love. For example, she is a woman of deep faith. She is a woman of great love. These are compliments. But if you hear “She is a woman of high hopes, or he is very idealistic,” we picture that person as naïve and foolish; an airhead.

Anton Chekhov in his play “The Cherry Orchard” gives us an interesting dialogue between a young idealist and an older woman named Lyubov Adreyevna.

The young man has offered his idealistic hopes for a beautiful future. And he is very certain of his truth for that brave new world. Then the old dowager replies:

“What is truth? YOU can see where there is truth and where there isn't, but I seem to have lost my sight, I see nothing. You boldly settle all the important questions, but tell me, my dear boy, isn't it because you are young and the questions of the world haven't hurt you yet?”

Ouch! If someone said to me when I was twenty -- Tell me my dear boy, isn't it because you are young and the questions of the world haven't hurt you yet? That would have put me in my place.

The first impression we get from the dowager's words is now, that she is old and has been hurt by the world, she does not have much hope. But I want to examine hopes of the elderly beyond that first impression. The elderly don't abandon the hopes of youth, rather they Marinate these hopes. Indeed, this is the Marian approach to hope; the Gospel tells us that as she was leaving episodes of her life, she pondered her hopes. She pondered the Annunciation. She pondered the glad tidings of the Christmas angels. She pondered the angel words in the dreams of her husband. She pondered all these high hopes in her heart. And so when we leave, any life stage, we need to ponder, to Mary-nate our hopes. Time and

experience are the sauce, not the extinction of hope. An older Mary would have answered the young man in this way: "My boy, that is a lovely vision, but the sword has not yet pierced your heart. I'm sure with time and experience your heart will get broken and your hopes will become real." Mary and Madam Adreyevna would agree: the questions of the world have to hurt you before anything real can begin. Time and experience, the piercing sword, wounds of love.

Leonard Cohen, the Canadian song writer, explains why everything in this beautiful world has a crack in it: that's how the light gets in.

Contrasting youth and age in respect to hope, G.K Chesterton writes:

"It is currently said that hope goes with youth, and lends to youth its wings of a butterfly: but I fancy that hope is the last gift given to us in old age, and it's the only gift not given to youth. Youth is pre-eminently the period in which one can be lyrical, fanatical, poetic; but youth is the period in which one can feel hopeless. The end of every episode is the end of the world. But the power of hoping through everything, the knowledge that the soul survives its adventures, this great inspiration comes to the elderly. God has kept this good wine, until then. It is from the back of the elderly woman or man that the wings of the butterfly should burst. There is nothing that so mystifies the young as the consistent frivolity of the old. They have discovered their indestructibility. They are in their second and clearer childhood, and there is meaning in the merriment of their eyes. They have seen the end of the End of the World."

Frivolity. Laughter. How you leave is where you will arrive. Perhaps the reason why this gift of merriment and light heartedness is given to those about to leave this world, is so they arrive, on the other shore, lightly into light.

I believe all of us will enter the light, but perhaps those who leave this world, with that hope of twinkling eyes, find themselves farther in the glorious light of heaven, deeper into the light heart of God.

How you leave is where you will arrive. This might sound irreverent, but I have always treasured the story I heard as a child, about one of my Italian Aunts; she was dancing the Tarantala at a wedding, when all at once, she had a heart attack, and died there on the dance floor. In my imagination I always pictured her dancing into heaven.

When I was a little boy I used to dance around and laugh a lot. But when I became a young man I thought my elders were too happy and frivolous. As Chesterton observed young people are bewildered by the mirth of their elders. I wondered why 'wise people' should be making wise cracks. Why aren't they more serious? My Sicilian grandmother tried to tell me, "Without humor nothing is serious." But I thought she was just making excuses for laughing at everything. Now that I am in my sixth decade I've started laughing more, especially at myself.

The first Eves had a sufficient sense of humor that they could see something beautiful in the absurd standing males, and that sense of humor got human evolution started. Laughter is the seed and the fruit of consciousness, and perhaps the fullest expression of consciousness. Is it possible that the crowning point, dare I say, the Omega Point of human evolution, might be laughter?

The last 20 minutes of our day of recollection will be quiet time when you're invited to practice some GLAD Gymnastics. Keeping in mind that GLAD stands for Glorious Light Ablaze Dauntless, I would like to paraphrase something the monk, Thomas Merton, wrote in an Essay about the One Light: "Every person is a diamond point of light. When these billions of diamond points converge you see the Face of God, a BLAZING SUN."

So the Glad Gymnastics only involves exercising your thumb and your pinky. Your thumb is the face of God, the Blazing Sun, the convergence of the billion points of light. Your pinky is you. Hold yourself against the Blazing Sun. And pray:

Hail Mary, Full of Light,

A Fire on Earth, ignited.

Blazing are you among the people,

And Blazing is the Sun rising in you.

Holy Mary, Mother of Divine Light,

Pray for us seeking light,

Now, to be enlightened.

Thank You. Amen.

Or shorter: Hail Mary,

Shining Bright,

Bearing Light,

Pray for me.

In dark days may this 2-finger prayer help you see God's Enduring Light. p. daino

