

Progress Not Perfection

In a play named Dublin Carol by Conor McPherson, the main character is John an undertaker and aging alcoholic, who is trying to downshift from benders and lost weekends, to steady and not overly destructive drinking. It's Christmas eve morning and his daughter – who he has not seen in over 10 years – arrives at his office unexpectedly, confesses that she has never stopped loving – and hating – him, and tells him that her mother, his ex-wife, is dying in the hospital.

John is an acute observer of his own weaknesses and begins reminiscing in excruciating detail about how his drinking has cost him his entire family: wife, son and daughter. Mary, his daughter, has an offer: she will come back at 5 PM and pick him up to go and see his ex-wife in the hospital. John stewes through the day awaiting his daughter. Late in the afternoon, he washes his face, combs his hair, puts on his coat and hat, sits in a chair and waits... .. as a nearby church clock chimes five o'clock, the lights go down and the play ends.

At the end of the Play we ask ourselves: did his daughter show up? If she did, did he get in the car with her or did he take off his coat, fix himself a drink and fail to visit his wife in the hospital...?

Sisters and brothers, John is a person poised on the edge of possibility. Out of nowhere an opportunity has arrived to make amends and at least begin to repair his broken family relationships. John knows at a deep level that the possibility of spiritual renewal has arrived. He smells hope and – no matter how destructive his past – he is building the courage to take a chance at some reconciliation. From a spiritual perspective we would say that John was at a potential “grace moment” – as we reflected at Christmas: in the midst of darkness and despair there burns a spark of light; with the potential to defy the darkness.

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Sisters and brothers, we all have spiritual centers where the divine spirit of Jesus is present – and no matter how deeply buried; connection with that center can move us forward with new vitality and action in our lives, our families, our relationships. This presence of grace in our center means that *everyone* is capable of surprising actions. Although families are notorious for putting one another in ‘boxes,’ the graced center of each individual may break out of those boxes and bring forth words and actions of love. For John, the alcoholic funeral director, that Christmas Eve afternoon was a moment for his graced center – the spark of the divine – to

break through his darkness; it was his for the choosing... . This does not mean that it would solve all the prior pain and difficulties, but could light the way forward.

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Today we celebrate the Feast of The Holy Family. The Holy Family is *holy* not because they were a perfect family; there is no such thing as a perfect family – we are all human, we all make mistakes, we hurt the ones we love. Jesus certainly hurt his parents when he took off as a young teenager to “be about his father’s business...” ( I can just imagine my mother’s response to that line!!) The Holy Family was a struggling family right from the beginning: life for the family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus was difficult and cruel: they were forced from their home and became refugees, they were the innocent victims of the political and social tensions of their time, they endured the suspicions of their own people when Mary’s pregnancy was discovered, their child was born under the most difficult and terrifying of circumstances; they experienced the agony of losing their beloved child... .

What makes The Holy Family holy – and a model for all of us as disciples – is not *perfection*, but rather is their connection to their spiritual center to what kept the spark of hope and light alive no matter how dark the moment. Connection with that divine spark within kept them in loving faithfulness with each other as they confronted the many tensions and crises that threatened their stability. Family holiness is not about perfection, it is about people living in close relationship to one another and discovering opportunities for our shared spirits to flourish. As we approach a new year, let us pray for the grace to be alert to those pregnant moments of growth. A good question for every holy family as we begin a new year might be: Are we ready to act on the call of the Spirit to better our life together?

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Before all be this seems to be “pie in the sky” – I’d like to share three very practical phrases that Pope Francis suggests need to be used in order to have healthy families and relationships of all kinds. And these might be considered three simple New Year’s Resolutions – simple and yet profound:

In speaking to a group of families, the Pope says:

“In order to have a healthy family, three phrases need to be used:

Number one: ‘please’ – we say ‘please’ so as not to be forceful family life. ‘May I, please, do this...?’ ‘Would you be happy if I did this?’ We do this with a language that seeks agreement.

Number two: ‘thank you’ – we say ‘thank you’: ‘thanks for your love...’ But – be honest with me, how many times do you say thank you to your wife? to your husband? how many days go by without uttering the word ‘thanks’?

Number three: ‘sorry’ – we all make mistakes and, on occasion, someone gets offended in the marriage and, sometimes, plates are smashed..., harsh words are spoken.... But please, listen to my advice: don’t ever let the sun set without reconciling. Peace is made each day in the family: ‘Please forgive me’ and then you start over. If you make peace immediately it’s okay; however, the cold resentment of the day before is much harder to move past. Therefore, make peace the same day. Forgive one another each day.”

“Please” ... “Thank you” ... “I’m sorry” ...

... three simple New Year’s Resolutions in our families ... our relationships ... in our common life together.

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I’d like to conclude this reflection on the Feast of the Holy Family, by sharing for a few moments, a bit on how our Parish Family is responding to one of the critical needs of our Global Human Family as we begin 2018.

January 1, New Year’s Day, is the 51<sup>st</sup> World Day of Peace in our global Church and Pope Francis has chosen as the theme “Migrants and Refugees: Men and Women in Search of Peace” as this year’s reflection — inviting us as Catholics to embrace those who endure perilous journeys and hardships order to find peace.

As you know, we have declared ourselves — along with St. Lucy’s, University United Methodist and Plymouth Congregational Church —a Sanctuary Parish, in coalition with other

Congregations discerning how they will be committed. As a Sanctuary Parish we have committed ourselves

- ❖ to educate ourselves about immigration related issues;
- ❖ to advocate for humane comprehensive immigration reform; and
- ❖ to journey, with other local organizations including the CNY Worker's Center, in accompanying and supporting the undocumented with their legal challenges.

In 2018, our commitment as a Sanctuary Parish and member of the CNY Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition will need a lot of support from within the Parish Community including something we can do today: We're asking that folks sign a letter we have prepared, in support of our Hector Navarro Miranda, a member of our local community who – just days before Christmas – was arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials, detained in Batavia and is in jeopardy of deportation. Hector had dropped his children off at school and his wife at work only to come home to find his house surrounded by ICE agents. Letters are at the entrances.

Secondly: we have wonderful news that our Parish Refugee Resettlement Committee, working with Le Moyne College's John Zogby and the Keenan Center at the Madden School of Business and our Congolese Community, have developed a six-week course – taught by Le Moyne College faculty members volunteering their time – to instruct 10 of our Congolese Parishioners in skills needed to start a small business. The program begins next Saturday; and we will have special blessing of the new 'students' at our 11:30 Mass today!

As we begin the New Year, let us all consider how we might connect with our Sanctuary efforts and/or our Refugee Resettlement Committee – offering each of us as God's children, graced opportunities, for reconciliation and peace in our extended family of sisters and brothers.

Finally, our Pope Francis reflects as we begin a new year:

“Hope is the virtue of a heart that doesn't lock itself into darkness, that doesn't dwell on the past, does not simply get by in the present, but is able to see a tomorrow. Hope is the door that opens onto the future. Hope is a humble, hidden seed of life that, with time, will develop into a large tree.... A tiny flicker of light that feeds on hope is enough to shatter the shield of darkness. A single individual is enough for hope to exist, and that individual can be you. And then there will be another “you,” and another “you,” and it turns into an “us.” And so, does hope begin when we have an “us”? No. Hope began with one “you.” When there is an “us,” there begins a revolution.

Amen! Happy New Year!