

This reflection appeared first in *The Church World*, the diocesan weekly of Maine.

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SPREADING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST THIS LENT

Lent is a season for making closer contact with the life of Jesus and the mysteries of His thirty-three years on the solid earth we inhabit today. We concentrate on His Passion in the last week.

During these forty-plus days, the Bible beckons to us, with the assurance that the words it contains will tell us about the Word of God who came to share our human nature. The ancient pages of the Hebrew Bible are rich sources for more fully illuminating the New Testament. St. Augustine says, "There are two things which all treatment of the scriptures is aiming at: a way to discover what needs to be understood, and a way to put across to others what has been understood" (*On Christian Doctrine*, Book 1:1).

When we recognize the reality that we are children of light with the illumination given us by Jesus, we experience at the same time a compelling call. We are summoned to help others move out of their darkness and make their way to Christ. That means we try to create opportunities for grace to be effective in this American world of ours in the opening decade of the twenty-first century. Like Paul, we say, "Before God, we are confident through Christ: not that we are qualified in ourselves to claim anything as our own work" (2 Cor 3:4,5). The Apostle to the Gentiles faced a pagan world with its own particular challenges. Today we in America are observers of a popular scene enticing in its color and sensual attraction. The glamour of seduction is presented to us continually. Human success is measured in monetary terms. "What is your income?" Fame is pursued, although we see too often how some highly publicized lives end in a notoriety of misery.

Christian communities don't disdain the human power of scientific inquiry, music, the arts and communication media, but we use them to light up the reality of the Reign of God in our midst. We try to make our individual behavior a lamp for people who are struggling in their personal debilitating shadows. Once a new dawn has risen in our hearts, we want to pass on the warmth, to let the early morning rays illuminate the path a brother or a sister has to walk.

To embrace authentic Christianity is to take on a demanding way of life—one that teaches a high level of morality. Every spiritual advance carries with it a call to greater virtue and to increased detachment from whatever hinders our progress in holiness. Growth in prayer isn't just a development of interior consciousness, an exploration of inner psychic states. Do some spiritualities strongly emphasize psychological processes? Undoubtedly yes. We have within us vast powers of awareness, a potential for getting in touch with ourselves at very deep levels. Intensive regimes offer to tap the psychic energies we possess. We can use these techniques and gain from them. But they should not become a substitute for prayer centered on the realities of our salvation in Christ.

Authentic prayer never stops with my own ego, absorbing me in self-contemplation. It is always reaching out to the Divine Other. It is a dynamic

relationship rooted in love. Everything in Christianity is marked with the sign of personhood--of a personal God ever in contact with the created person. Our ultimate mystery is Three Divine Persons in One God and these Three dwell irrevocably in each one of us. The mark of glory is upon us even if we try to deny it. To be made in the image of God is to be unable to lose our likeness to divinity no matter how much we betray our inmost identity.

The Holy Spirit is always bending over us, breathing into our being the invitation to ever greater union with One Who cared for us unto crucifixion. We have a God Who rises with each dawn of our numbered days and offers us a more abundant drink of glory for the next twenty-four hours. Paul proclaimed this to the Corinthians, "The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we with our faces unveiled reflecting like mirrors the glory of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this comes from the Lord who is Spirit" (2 Cor 3:17,18).

In our Lent of 2006, we work with the Spirit to extend the power of Christ's salvific offering in ourselves and in the world.

Why work for less?

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