

“The Bible: Jesus Is Lord”
John 1:1-5

This past week, a little video of three little girls (triplets) has gone viral. I found myself sitting there and watching it. They were doing normal human things such as eating, playing, and getting cleaned. Yet, they were so adorable that one can't help but watch and find joy. It is so easy to think of the image of God in them and to admire the beauty of God's creation. It is much harder to see God's image in ourselves or in others when we move beyond that phase of cuteness and innocence. Yet, the image of God is still there within us and within others. Our spiritual journey is about rediscovering and reclaiming that image. It is hidden in plain sight. It is like those picture puzzles where the items you are looking for are hidden in plain sight. Because of the clutter of other items around them, it is hard to see. One has to pay close attention. The clutter of life will cloud our vision and mislead us to hate, fear, control, and lose our way.

The great themes of scriptures are strong reminders for us to return to that sense of unity with God where the image of God is more dominant than all the clutter around it. The life of Jesus is a witness to that image. Jesus showed us the fullness of God's love through his way of love, self-giving, and challenge to the cultures of dominance in the world. When we claim him as our Lord, we claim him as our guide on that journey.

Each of the Gospels tries to convey to us this good news in its own unique way. John's Gospel presents Jesus to us as the creative Word of God which was spoken to bring creation into being. Jesus is the manifestation of that Word in human flesh and is the way God renews creation.

The words “in the beginning” echo the words found in Genesis 1:1. Jesus was renewing what God has created; renewing God's creative work of creation. The energy of love that is at the heart of all of creation is often diverted by the powers of hate and destruction in the world. Yet, this energy always finds a new way to be manifested and to redirect humanity and creation on the path of love. Love always finds a way to redeem and to heal that which is broken, but only through loving means. And that is the way Jesus lived and brought renewal. He never succumbed to the temptation to use ego power to bring about his vision for the world. He always used the power of love as the path and the means to the same end. The darkness or brokenness of our lives and of our world can never overcome the light of love. The challenge is to stay resolute in our love. Jesus leaves us an incredible example of that. We may admire him and think very highly of him. We may even venerate and worship him, but unless we allow him to be our daily companion and guide to accessing our souls, the image of God in us, his way of love will stay as an ideal and not a reality in our lives.

In his book *Faith after Doubt*, Brian McLaren talks about our human tendency toward violence and evil. He uses the term “functional pathology” to refer to the fact that most people who commit acts of violence or evil are conditioned and desensitized to think that violence and domination could really solve our problems. Most of us are conditioned to believe that sometimes we have to use unloving means to get what we want and need.

And this pathology is so deeply ingrained in us, that we don't question it because it is like the air we breathe. Brian Martin writes that, "Awareness of the damaging effects of violence is not enough to turn more than a few people towards a rejection of violence." We have to be schooled in the way of love so that we may emerge with a greater moral awareness and development.

This is the work of faith. It is the daily practices of prayer, of kindness, of service, of letting go, of forgiveness, of affirmation, and of silence that help us to see the hidden divine treasure in ourselves and in our neighbors. The Word has to take flesh in each of us. The incarnation of God is not about some distant event in the past. It is about each of us experiencing it anew. Jesus started a movement by training his followers in the way of non-violent and non-coercive love. Our invitation is to do the same. We are invited to be intentional each day to let the consciousness of Christ take root in our lives.

In his book *Invitation to Love*, Thomas Keating presents many spiritual practices that allow Jesus to be our guide in daily life. He writes, "Another practice for daily life is to work an active prayer sentence of six to twelve syllables into our subconscious memory by saying it at moments when we are not engaged in a kind of activity that requires our attention. It can be a sentence from Scripture or words of our own choice. The hesychastic practice of saying the 'Jesus Prayer' in Orthodox Christianity is a model for this discipline. According to the teaching of *The Way of the Pilgrim*, when the 'Jesus Prayer' has been repeated day after day for a long time, it enters the heart and starts to repeat itself. The Desert Fathers used to say verses from the psalms. Several of their favorites have been enshrined in the divine office: 'Oh God, come to my assistance! Oh Lord, make haste to help me!' Or, 'Our help is in the name of the Lord.' It takes a lot of determination and time to work a sentence into our subconscious memory by saying it again and again, but these times will present themselves if we are alert to make use of them. Most people spend a couple of hours a day in more or less mindless activity -- taking a shower, doing the dishes, driving a car, walking to work, waiting for a bus or for the phone to ring. Once worked into the subconscious memory, this new 'tape' tends to erase the prerecorded tapes already in place. Whenever one of the emotional programs is frustrated, a painful emotion promptly records the fact, and an appropriate commentary arises from our store of prerecorded tapes: 'How can this happen to me? . . . How cruel everybody is to me! . . . I'm no good.' If we have worked a sentence or two into our subconscious memory that is about the same length as our normal commentaries, it erases the former tapes and this reduces the force of the upsetting emotions. If there is no commentary, the process of building up emotional binges is less likely to take place. That gives us a neutral zone in which we can decide what to do.

The following story exemplifies the effects of the active prayer sentence. A certain woman was driving down a country road, hugging the center to avoid hitting a boy on a bicycle. A man drove up behind her, who was in a great hurry and wanted to pass her. He did not see the boy on the bicycle and did not understand why the woman was nudging the center of the road. He kept honking the horn, meaning, 'Get out of the way!' When she did not move over to let him pass, his program of rage and accompanying commentaries took over. Pushing the accelerator to the floor, he zoomed around her and, as he passed,

rolled down the window, shouted obscene words at her, and spat right in her face! Anger, shame, hurt feelings, and grief all started to surface in the woman. At the same time, her store of commentaries also began to arise: 'How could someone be so cruel? How could God allow this to happen? . . . All men are beasts!'

Just as she was about to lose control, up came her active prayer sentence: 'How sweet and pleasant it is for people to live together in unity!' The new tape erased the old tapes, and she entered into a neutral zone where she was not preprogrammed to react one way or the other. Into that empty space rushed the Holy Spirit saying. 'Love the guy!' A wave of peace flooded her whole being. She was filled with love, joy, and all the other fruits of the Spirit. She forgave the man from the bottom of her heart and drove on down the road as if she had just received a bouquet of roses.

This example points in a special way to the practical purpose that all the various means of bringing the effects of contemplative prayer into everyday life actually serve. They cultivate a neutral zone or open space within us from which we can decide what to do. That is true freedom. The neutral zone enables God, according to circumstances, to manifest all the fruits of the Spirit in and through us: charity, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, self-control, and meekness."

And so today, we come to the table of Christ, with the same intention. We are opening our hearts through a simple act of sharing to let God's presence shape us and redeem our awareness of the divine image in us and in all of creation.

To prepare, I would like to invite you to you to a simple practice of Lectio Divina using the words of Jesus from Matthew 11:28

28 Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Amen.