



St John's Cathedral 聖公會聖約翰座堂

Anglican Diocese of Hong Kong Island
Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui

Message of Hope: The world as a sacrament

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Hi, I'm Dwight dela Torre, a chaplain here at St. John's Cathedral Hong Kong, Chaplain to the Filipino Congregation... and welcome once more to St John's Cathedral's Message of Hope.

I have received this short poem some years back, but it recently showed up again on my Facebook account! It raises our spirit to reach up and lifts us up from life's vicissitudes.

I am sure many of you have seen or read this yourselves but let me share it with you once again. I do not know who wrote it, nor do I know the title, but whoever wrote it, she or he is a discerning person, susceptible to God's presence and self-manifestation.

And to the author, thank you for it.

It goes like this:

A man whispers, 'God speak to me'
and a meadowlark sang
But the man did not hear.

So the man yelled, 'God, speak to me'
And thunder rolled across the sky
But the man did not listen.

The man looked around and said,
'God let me see you.'
And the sun shone brightly.
But the man did not see.

And the man shouted, 'God show me a miracle.'
And a life was born.
But the man did not notice.

So the man cried out in despair,
'Touch me God and let me know you are here.'
Whereupon God reached down and touched the man.
But the man brushed away the butterfly and walked on.

Now, I don't know if the last paragraph is part of the poem, or the moral of the poem but yes it is a great reminder:

'Don't miss out on a blessing, simply because it is not packaged the way you wanted it to be.'

This poem has some similarity to a short story I read years and years back, actually, when I was still in high school. I have forgotten the author and the title. But it's like this: A pair of lovers were seated on the sea wall along Manila Bay – it was of course much much cleaner than today's Manila Bay; and the air was fresher and healthier – They were watching the famous sunset over Manila Bay. The woman enthused and was static about how beautiful the colour of the sky was; about how the colour got reflected on the calm late afternoon sea; how red glow of the setting sun changes as it slowly slides under the horizon; and how great God is who created such a magnificent and majestic beauty, etc. after a while, they were silent. And then the guy simply said. 'It is all dust.'

It may all be dust. But both the poem and the short story remind us that in the everyday ordinary things, are contained the wonders and mysteries of God waiting to be discovered, and enjoyed and celebrated.

William Blake a British poet who lived from 1757-1827, wrote something that expresses this, as well.

'To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.'

For him, the grain of sand, the wild flower, though mundane, and utterly simple and ordinary, are conveyors of the divinity in the world. In other words, the world is a sacrament of the divine.

Laurence Kushner, a rabbi once wrote in his book 'Repairing the World,'
'Jewish spirituality invites us to wake up and open our eyes to the myriad beautiful, mysterious and holy things happening all around us every day. Many of them are like little miracles: when we wake up and see the morning light, when we taste food and are nourished, when we learn from others and grow wise, when we embrace people we love and receive their affection in return, when we help those around us and feel good. All these and more are there for us everyday. But we must open our eyes to see them.'

But I think this applies to Christian spirituality as well. 'Our challenge and goal is to find it and then act in such a way as to help others find it.' he said.

Furthermore, he wrote:

'When we say God is everywhere, it does not mean that God is invisible. It means if we look closely, we can find God's presence hidden everywhere because God created everything.'

For us who believe in the incarnation, in the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, what Rob an Episcopal priest, as quoted by Kushner, said should resonate with us: 'We must continuously seek to find God in every person. Jesus is only the beginning. The ultimate goal is to find my Lord within everyone -- even people I like a lot less ..., even people I dislike, even ones I despise.'

Kushner once more said:

'That's what it means to say that God can take the form of a human being. That event in the past imposed an obligation for what might happen in the future. Each human meeting is another potential opportunity toward that ultimate goal.'

It is said that COVID-19 has brought out the worst and the best in humanity.

May we be attuned to the stirrings of God in nature and in our fellow human beings, and meet Jesus in them, and by them and through them.