Spirituality
Soul Seeing



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by Mark Etling

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One of the traditional rituals of the Catholic Church is the practice of genuflecting before the tabernacle as we enter and leave church. Genuflection is an

acknowledgement of the presence of the Blessed Sacrament — the real presence of Christ — in the tabernacle.

In recent years, we have been encouraged to perform a similar ritual before taking Communion. We bow just before we receive the consecrated bread and wine to express our belief that they are the body and blood of Christ.

These gestures are signs of reverence for the sacramental presence of Christ. They remind us also to reflect on the real presence of Christ in ourselves and in everyone, because we are all created in God's image and likeness.

My faith tells me that God is really present in me. I am created out of the same "stuff " as God: perfect love and wisdom and peace. The Godliness of Christ resides in me whether I am aware of it or not. Jesus tells us, "I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:20).

God is likewise really present in every person on earth. Every man, woman and child are created in God's image, aglow with the spark of divinity. We should, therefore, reverence the presence of God in everyone we meet — the same reverence we show to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. There is no place for hatred or prejudice or indifference if we believe that every person is an incarnate presence of God in the world.

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-82), the mystical doctor of the church who saw all things with the eye of her soul, famously wrote: "Christ has no body on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassionately on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours!"

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This powerful truth of our oneness extends even to those we think of as enemies. We love our neighbor as ourself not just because Jesus taught us to do so but because our neighbor is us, and so we "bless those who curse us and pray for those who mistreat us" (Luke 6:28). There is no exception. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Several years ago, my wife and I were privileged to attend a talk given by another Teresa — St. Teresa of Calcutta. I confess I don't remember anything she said — but I do remember well the simple gesture she extended to us at the beginning and the end of her presentation. She put her hands together at her forehead and bowed to us. Reverence for the presence of God.

God is also really present in "Sister, Mother Earth," as St. Francis of Assisi referred to her. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

Sister, Mother Earth feeds us, provides the air we breathe, shares her beauty with us. And Sister, Mother Earth needs us to care for her as her children. We show reverence for the Earth by caring for her, by working in harmony with her. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Revelation 21:1).

The Eucharist spurs us to respect and revere everything — ourselves, our neighbor, the Earth. The real presence is in us and through us and all around us.

This attitude of reverence flows from the fundamental belief that is found in one form or another in all the major religions — the affirmation that we are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28), and "God is all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Be still then, and know the quiet presence of God.

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