

Christmas journey into the human

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | Dec. 22, 2010 Bulletins from the Human Side

During this week of Christmas, we stand with the Wise Men under a sign in the night sky.

It celebrates an aspect of the feast that, much as for the Kings bearing their gifts, commits us to a journey to the end of the way of the wandering star -- as Chesterton sings of it -- to the things that cannot be and that are, to the place where God was homeless and all men are at home.

Our own pilgrimage, as with all biblical wandering, summons us not to the faraway but to the near at hand. To where we are all at home, deep inside ourselves in the Mystery that lies at the core of Christmas -- that of being human.

The conjunction of the winter solstice and the eclipse of the moon this year coalesce as our guiding star for they lead us to the cave of Christ's birth. The cave is an ancient symbol connected with the winter solstice as the place where the birth of light occurs. Here, too, as Joseph Campbell writes, is the cave of the heart, the dark chamber of the heart, where the light of the divine first appears.

The cave at whose entrance we stand is also an image associated, according to Campbell, with the emergence of light in the beginning, out of the abyss of the early chaos, so that one senses the deep resonations of that theme.

This week we not only feel these symbols throughout our beings, but we sense their power to touch even those who so publicly deny the existence of God while at the same time responding to the deep unnamed radiations of this Mystery within them.

They strain for the renewal of the light, turning involuntarily, as humans always do, toward the sun as it seems to hesitate in the heavens before turning back to bring light and warmth to us.

Each time such persons deny the Mystery they actually profess it. Each time they light a candle, smile at a window filled with welcoming light, or even watch a Christmas Carol, they unknowingly but truly participate in this great Mystery that celebrates our being human.

So it is with merchants and so called secular forces that are accused of robbing Christmas of its true meaning.

They -- like the kings who wore the caps of Mithra, the Lord of Light -- cannot help but proclaim this year end Mystery for they now begin to prepare the way of the Lord right after Halloween with the noisy, slightly off-key acclaim of those who underscore rather than erase the Mystery of Christmas.

They, too, want to touch the heart -- that is, to enter the Cave of Mystery as, by ministering to those who yearn to remember each other with cards and gifts, they reflect the light of the love that is the pulse beat of the Mystery of Being Human.

Atheists have erected billboards with Christmas symbols that read "You know it's a Myth."

One wonders how they would feel if they understood that their advertising emphasizes rather than diminishes the powerful symbolism of the feast itself by their literally ill-starred efforts to mock the feast.

Yes, we know it is a Myth but thanks for the reminder that Christmas is as rich in symbols as a Christmas tree is with winking lights -- and that Myth does not mean a falsehood, as they superficially believe, but instead symbolizes spiritual truth in a special language that transcends the changes worked by time and chance on our memories.

It is touching to read the atheists' own claim, "Being Reasonable since 1958." One feels sorry for them as if they all missed their train back then and have been trying to make something good of their loneliness ever since. We enter time out of time in the cave of Christmas, a feast that is unreasonable precisely because it is such a towering light of Mystery.

The Mystery of Being Human is also symbolized by the nature of an eclipse -- in which by the light of the Sun, the symbol of the Eternal, the image of the earth is projected onto the Moon that is the Symbol of Time.

Our calling as humans is to bring the Eternal into the field of Time, to allow us, by the power of the Eternal, to leave our marks in Time -- to leave signs, as the astronauts did with their boot prints, that we have entered the Mystery of Being Human by taking on Time, that we are not afraid of its stepchildren of illness, accident, and death, that we light up all of history by our being as fully human as we can be.

We all make the same journey to this place "where all men are at home" -- to this cave that indeed symbolizes the heart and leads to our own depths.

The conjunction of the eclipse and the winter solstice whispers to us that Brother Sun and Sister Moon have lighted our pilgrimage to this place where all of us are at home.

Isn't that where everybody goes at Christmas?

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