

## Divine Mud

In the midst of Black Friday now interrupting Thanksgiving dinner, with more and more sporting activities crowding into Sunday mornings for our young families, and a front page filled daily with all that's going wrong in the world, we thankfully are given, beginning today, the gift of Advent.

Advent is that season of the church year that takes up maybe a month or so before the celebration of Christmas.

For the next four weeks, our keiki will light Advent wreath candles and our altar and your clergy will be dressed in purple.

Purple for royalty - of Christ the King.

Purple for bruises - of Christ the King.

If we accept this gift, we can have for ourselves, alone and in community, a pause from the craziness that descends particularly in the US at this time of year.

Advent is the time to sit with the expectant mother who waits for a time not of her choosing for life to be born.

Advent is a time to repent - to change direction - to change our minds - to turn toward the face of God's welcoming smile.

Advent is a time out of time.

Last week I had the privilege of presiding at 4 burials in 5 days.

And at every burial, the question that is asked, sometimes out loud, most often though in silence, is: "What are we?"

Are we merely mud, animated for a while, only to return to the mud forever?

Are we spirit, somehow trapped in a body that, at the end of the day, is only a shell?

What are we?

The other Wednesday at the crack of dawn, my buddy Preston and I were on dish duty after the St. Peter's fried rice breakfast with the Central Middle School kids.

So I heard Preston tell me he'd been made a *pustulant* by the bishop, which took me back because — who knew the bishop was handing out measles?

But it turns out he meant to say he'd been made a **postulant** for holy orders, meaning he's just taken a big step forward to becoming a deacon in this church.

So what do dishwashing deacons-to-be and clergymen talk about at 7 in the morning?

Well, we talked about those dead from last week - and we talked about those questions that come up, especially in the presence of the dead, "what are we?" - "who are we?"

Are we merely mud?

Are we spirits trapped in bodies that are not only unnecessary but that seem to attract so much pain?

And the march of time that we are all caught up in, where is it going and does it mean something? ....does it mean anything?

These are Advent questions.

And while the pat answers are few and far between, our faith points to places where we might sit and be nourished with glimpses of what we hope are glimpses of eternal truth.

It begins with the purple.

Purple for royalty.

Purple for bruises.

What odd opposites to join together!

As you have made your way through life, have you noticed how so many folks tend to be either/or kind of people?

Whether it's democratic or republican; commie or capitalist; in or out, First Hawaiian or Bank of Hawaii, we seem so many of us to be in love with either/or.

A popular TV commercial is making the point lately when the fellow puts together his above ground swimming pool using only the bolts, but not the nuts - a good demonstration of the consequences of "either/or," not "both/and" living - as the pool collapses and his young daughter is carried away on her inflatable rubber duckie.

Living a life of either/or can and often does have unintended consequences!

But our faith calls us to a life that is not consumed with either/or - but a life devoted to both/and.

Pope Francis is very definitely singing this tune and seems to be creating quite a stir with our Roman brothers and sisters as he breaks through the false barriers separating abortion from the death penalty, and prayer from poverty, and doctrine from the economic havoc wreaked on so many for the benefit of so few by world-wide capitalism.

It's not either/or, he's saying, it's both/and.

Which gets us back to our meditation this First Sunday of Advent.

Who are we?

What are we?

We are not merely mud.

Nor are we merely spirits trapped in otherwise useless bodies.

We are mud, yes, but we are also divine.

By the grace of God, each and every human being, made in the image and likeness of God, is a magnificent definition of what it is to be both mud and divine.

Before each human being, if we only have the eyes to see, and ears to hear, is an angel crying out: "Make way for the image of God!"

And if this is the reality of who we are, then Paul's urgent words to the Romans today are also urgent words to us today: "now [is] the moment for you to wake from sleep! Now is the time of salvation! The night is far gone, the day is near!"

And there is this.

If we are merely mud, then meaning in this life comes only from grabbing every feel good moment, no matter its cost to ourselves or the wider community.

If we are merely spirits inhabiting temporary bodies - then the need to care for these bodies, to care for each other in our physical needs, to care for the air and resources of this planet, becomes something of little importance.

After all, if becoming disembodied spirits is our final destiny, then the physical has no lasting meaning, and therefore little present importance.

But this is not the Christian faith; as much as the influences of modern consumerism, corporate profits and ancient Greek philosophy would like it to be.

Nick Krisof wrote this in his newspaper column on Thanksgiving day:

"When I've written recently about food stamp recipients, the uninsured and prison inmates, I've had plenty of pushback from readers.

A reader named Keith reflected a chorus when he protested: 'If kids are going hungry, it is because the parents are not upholding their responsibilities.'

A reader in Washington bluntly suggested taking children from parents and putting them in orphanages.

Jim asked: 'Why should I have to subsidize someone else's child? How about personal responsibility? If you procreate, you provide.'" N. Kristof, NYT, 11/28/13, pA25.

These are the expected musings of those who see human beings as merely either mud or spirit.

But if we are divine mud, mud made divine by the grace of God; embodied spirits, spirits who exist in and only in bodies – bodies that through the resurrection will one day be transformed – but bodies still –then each of us must matter to the other – this good creation given to us by God must matter – and we know this to be true because of the day that awaits when we end our month long meditation called Advent – when Almighty God, the king of kings and lord of lords, the Alpha and the Omega, becomes divine mud; divinity fused with mud in the birth of our Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

+amen

