

Tuesday Reflection 19 January 2021

Unity and Peace

We are now well into the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which appropriately starts with Peace Sunday. It is significant that Jesus' great wish is that "all may be one" and that His blessing in His farewell discourse in St John's Gospel contains the wish that "in me you may have peace" (17:33 and the blessing "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" (14:27).

Unity, however, does not mean uniformity - on the contrary. When we look at God's Creation we see a marvellous celebration of diversity, but at the same time a diversity which forms a great interdependent whole.

On the subject of peace, the Chinese philosopher Lao Tse wrote:

If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbours.
If there is to be peace between neighbours,
There must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart.

Into which we could perhaps insert:

If there is to be peace between the religions,
There must be peace between the churches.

Given that God is infinite, no one religion, creed or denomination preaching peace can, in all humility, lay sole claim to the truth or refuse to accept that all religions share in God's truth.

What Lao Tse makes clear is that peace has to rise from the heart, from within us, where the Prince of Peace dwells. Peace is an inner disposition which governs the way we see the world.

As the author Brian McLaren writes, peace is not possible if our basic attitude tells us that the purpose of life is for individuals or nations to accumulate an abundance of possessions and to experience the maximum amount of pleasure during the maximum number of minutes of our short lives; then we will live in a constant state of rivalry and have little reason to manage our consumption. If we tell ourselves that we are in life-and-death competition with each other and with Nature, then we will have little reason to seek reconciliation and collaboration and nonviolent resolutions to our conflicts.

But if our belief is that we are free and responsible creatures in a creation made by a good, wise, and loving God, and that our Creator wants us to pursue virtue, collaboration, peace, and mutual care for one another and all living creatures, and that our lives can have profound meaning if we align ourselves with God's wisdom, character, and dreams for us . . . then we will have peace.

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