

A CHRIST-SOAKED WORLD

Richard Rohr tells us that “the great task of religion is to keep us fully awake, alert and conscious.”¹ Our religion presently appears to be falling drastically apart. How we bring the foundational belief in divine love to ever more deepening consciousness is a daily challenge. Dare I say, a moment by moment task. Again, Rohr reminds us that “it’s more about waking up than about cleaning up.”² How do we stay awake to the divine presence in each moment?

Moving home just as lockdown happened due to the COVID-19 pandemic turned out to be a real gift. It gave me the opportunity to unpack in a relaxed way and not have to rush away to work. It gave the occasion to walk and discover places of interest in these new surroundings. It also gave the grace of finding precious treasures that lay hidden in the back garden simply awaiting exploration and discovery.



The “Trinity Tree” was an obvious first gift. From the moment I arrived this magnificent pine tree spoke volumes to me. I could see the figure of Christ in its trunk and I very easily placed myself there with him. At Easter time an angel was visible within this tree.

Sitting within the shadow of the Trinity Tree became a real comfort. It heard the heart-felt cries of loneliness and lack of human contact in the beginning. It heard the cries of a heart that was desirous of “the more”. It heard the wonderings of what was happening in and to our world, the ponderings of hardship and pain. It also witnessed the discovery of “little things” that gave great delight – the birds that followed around the garden as I worked. The invitation to communicate and to become one with each other. The baby kookaburra who followed from tree to tree, simply so we could be together.

Here was the gift of “waking up” to the divine love that surrounded me in generous proportions; right here in my front and back yard – my sanctuary! Here it was that I

¹ Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation Week Fifty Self-Emptying Wednesday Dec 16, 2020

² © 2019 Richard Rohr; *The Universal Christ: How a forgotten Reality can Change Everything we see, Hope For, and Believe*; Convergent Books; p 72

discovered that I was indeed living in a Christ-Soaked world! I was making preparation for a retreat using Richard Rohr's book **The Universal Christ**.³ I was indeed having the experience of the need to take my head off, shake it furiously and put it back on.⁴ The ideas, images and reality of this book blew my mind apart! Then came the experience that blew my world apart and set me on the path of deep knowing.

As I wandered around the front yard to empty water on the plants, the most beautiful King Parrot flew close by me and sat on the fence. An Eastern Rosella came with him. In utter delight I simple started talking to them. They answered in their own way. Together we shared a few moments. I move to the other side of the yard and they both came too. The Parrot sitting on the fence and the Rosella on the mailbox. Again, both were so close I could touch them. Here I was between those two messengers of God. They chirped away to me, looking me in the eye, both of them. I recognised the King Parrot as one who often came to the back yard when I was there. As they chirped, I said I would go get some feed. When I returned, they flew to the verandah and the King Parrot perched on the roof and bent his head down and chirped at me, our eyes meeting. This experience totally blew me away. My body experienced such incredible joy, delight and wonder that words could not describe it. It was like my heart was lifted out of my body and expanded. I knew this was a visit from God. It really was like meeting God for the first time in such a deep-down bodily way. I kept saying out loud (there was no one around!) "How special is that! I am one with God". It made me feel so connected and there was nothing that separated me from the rest of creation. Absolutely nothing! The Creator God and I were one breath! I truly was fully awake, alert and consciously aware of our great God of Creation and the connection that we share.

Then comes crunch time and the purpose of CEN –as a group of folks “who seek to change violent and hurting situations in our world through the power and intention of contemplative time together, and so help evolve the world through Love.”

A family situation that is in definite need of diffusing hostility, violence and hurt arises and there I am right in the middle of it! Again, there is the pleading with God... give me strength, tell me what I need to do. Sending love and positive thoughts to this situation without limits tests the positive mind and heart. Oh, the prayer for wisdom... the gift of wisdom that breaks through boundaries...that touches the depths of my own being with grace and gift, with wisdom and insight, with hope and belief. Then comes a sentence – a gift – “restoring the human heart to its full intimacy and friendship with God.”⁵ While not quite awake in those early hours before dawn I call on God for what I need to do this. Almost immediately comes the response: “Trust your inner authority.” With thanks on my lips I fall back into sleep for that last half

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid p 21

⁵ Sr Elena Marie Piteo op © 2020 Adore Advent & Christmas Daily Reflection 2020; Catholic Diocese of Wollongong p 35

hour before dawn. Now I am beginning to have a sense of what needs to be done to distil this hurtful and indeed harmful situation. Placing us all in the lap of the Trinity is the most practical thing I can do besides remaining positive and hopeful.

Then comes the needed confirmation. Out in the back yard, the King Parrot and his partner fly close to my shoulder, sit on the veggie garden post and look at me. I have named these friends Herbie and Henrietta. Henrietta flies to the Trinity Tree and takes up her position to witness this encounter. Herbie turns his head and looks me in the eye with such connection that immediately we are one...breathing the same air, sharing the same desire, longing for the same hope. I invite Henrietta to come down closer, but she chooses to stay where she is. Herbie just looks, his compassionate eyes firmly fixed on mine. My body is electric with sheer joy, delight, wonder and awe, and mostly gratitude! I simply say a huge "Thank You. Now I know for sure



what needs to be done." It seems I am transplanted into a new reality - out of this world of pain and hurt - into one that totally belongs to **The Christ**. The conversation continues for a good couple of minutes. I had been longing for Herbie to come back and asking God for this precious gift. Now the sheer wonder of it was more than I expected! He stayed put as I moved closer to him. It was possible to touch him, but I chose not to. He is such a gift to me. We shared our presence and our love, as well as our longing for total connection forever! Here was Love right in front of me looking me in the eye and encouraging me to be Love in the world! I live in a Christ-Soaked world indeed!

The decision now to "seek to change (the) violent and hurting situation" I found myself in needed to be carried forward! It inevitably consisted of several stages. Gathering all the courage I could muster, with deep knowledge that God was walking into this situation with me... we went...no holes barred! This truly was a "hands-on" experience. With great trepidation and a small sense of hope I walked away to await the next segment.

My experience with Herbie and Henrietta has taught me to keep alert to the signs of God's presence no matter where I found myself, noting the little hints that were available to those with eyes to see and a heart to read. While awaiting the next outcome I found myself visited by a beautiful Blue Wren and another pair of King Parrots. These were not in my own backyard, but visitations indeed. In the meantime,

a lot was happening within my own heart. A purification had taken place where the need “to hang on” was relinquished and a sense of freedom discovered.



It became apparent that no matter where I looked, there was God, smiling back at me. There was God in the sunlight shining through the trees, in the flowers in the garden, in the snail slimily sliding along the pathway, the spiderweb sparkling silvery in the tree after rain! When presence meets Presence something special happens. The human heart is expanded; the daily gestures of grace extravagantly given are welcomed; even in the darkness there can be a tiny weeny glimpse of light calling forward into the fullness of knowing.

We live in a Christ-Soaked world that is fraught with such pain, heartache, distress and war; not only globally, but within our own families, communities and neighbourhoods. If only we can be alert

and awake enough to see Christ suffering in it all and learn to hold it long enough with compassion, love and hope for transformation to take place.

Catholic author, artist, mystic, popular religious writer and poet, Caryl Houselander wrote:

“World take my heart, which shrinks from the stark realism and ugliness of suffering and expand it with Your love. Open it wide with the fire of Your love, as a rose is opened by the heat of the sun. Drive me by the strength of Your tenderness to come close to human pain. Give me hands that are hardened by pity, that will dip into any water and bathe any wound in mercy. Give me Your hands, hands that heal the blind by their touch, hands that raise the dead and are nailed to the cross; give me Your hands to tend the wounds of the body and the wounds of the mind.”⁶

This is our invitation – every single one of us – our invitation...to remain alert to the suffering vulnerable God we find so close to us that our hands can reach out and touch, hold and heal. May our hearts be expanded, alert and awake enough to accept with great love this invitation and heal our families, communities, neighbourhoods and world, for indeed we live in a Christ-Soaked world.

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⁶ © 1955 Caryl Houselander, Way of the Cross, Sheed & Ward.