

A FEW SMALL GREEN APPLES

PEACE

Peace is next on the list of the fruits of the Spirit. My personal experience is of knowing brief moments of a deep sense of peacefulness, within the context of a life that is busy, demanding and usually stressful. Perhaps that makes the awareness of such moments all that much more meaningful and satisfying. We can even recall these moments in order to comfort ourselves when stressed-out or sad.

I can think of two specific examples when this sense of peace is a deeply spiritual one for me. One is of the many occasions when I held one of our three children in my arms in one of our rocking chairs, cozily cuddling and rocking them into peaceful sleep. You should know that I love rocking chairs in general (we have seven in our home) and have composed my sermons sitting in one over many years. This was our favorite way of putting our children to sleep and something I shared with my wife with great joy. It always filled me with awe and a sense of God's creative presence, and thus of wonderful peace, to hold a beautiful "bundle" of our flesh and blood in my arms, usually gently rocking and softly singing to them. And because my wife has had the joy and pleasure of caring for our grandchildren a couple of days each week, there have been occasions where this same joy and peace is experienced with them! The sense of peacefulness I'm referring to is so palpable

that my being seemed suffused with a happy serenity.

The second example of a spiritual peace is that feeling of awesome serenity that comes in moments of worship. The solemn high masses, with incense and candles glowing in a darkened church in the very late hours of the Christmas Eve liturgy always gave me goose bump-deep peacefulness in my teen years. Being the priest officiating does not produce this in me, given the stresses of responsibility and performance. In those teen years I would walk home in the early hours of Christmas morning feeling that the mystery of the Birth of Christ reached right into and caressed my very heart. Of course I had imagined that birth to be the most quiet, gentle, peaceful moment in all human history, not knowing better. But I also felt that no matter what turmoil or problems there were in my life, walking all alone in the absolute quiet of a starry morning, still "spiritually high" from worship, that I too savored that magic of a quiet, gentle, peacefulness. Most important of all, even then, I knew this sense of peace was a gift from outside, that with all things of the spirit it was a gift from God. Therefore it was an awe-filled serenity rather than a happy serenity.

I must add that of course one doesn't always receive a deep sensation of peace in the act or sharing of worship. The fact that it doesn't happen all that often is significant. It makes this spiritual peace both more precious and memorable. It usually breaks in on us, becomes for us a "discovery" of a

Godly experience. Let me describe what I mean in an experience that I had a couple of years ago. It happened during a month of a sabbatical study at St. George's College in Jerusalem. One segment of the course on the Old Testament took us on a field trip to the Sinai Desert. We had camped out in the desert, did some hiking, and arrived at St. Catherine's Monastery at the foot of Mt. Sinai for the high point of the experience, namely, to ascend Mt. Sinai. Our guide had arranged for the usual, renting camels to take our group up the mountain to the resting place, called Elijah's Plateau.

We were awakened in the monastery dorms at 3:30 a.m. and assembled for our rides and the ascent at 4:00 a.m. Obviously it was still very dark outside. Unfortunately for our guide, another group had gotten there just before us, and even though they had not made advance reservations, the Arab camel drivers had taken their money and thus already begun the climb. That meant our group was five camels short. Being a gentleman, I was one of five who agreed to forgo the camel ride and walk. Of course the truth is that I was relieved because I had had my doubts about riding on the beasts anyway.

The agreement made with the Arab camel drivers was that when the earlier group arrived at the top, they would send five camels back for us "volunteers" who were walking, that way our group could make its start on time. Even though I was 60 years old, I exercise and was in good shape, and found the hike up Mt. Sinai

exhilarating. At one point in our climb up the snake like path, I could see opposite me the silhouette of the camels, with riders on their backs and led by walking camel drivers, and thought of the Wise Men in their caravan. Three of the walkers actually did get retrieved and rode part way, but I was glad to have hiked up all the way. It made me feel like Moses, who I am sure, did not have a camel ride. More to the point, the fact that I was feeling so fulfilled played into what would become one of the most poignant worship experiences of my life. Our group assembled in the area of Elijah's Plateau. The plan was to have a communion service together, then eat breakfast before making a final ascent up to the peak of Mt. Sinai. It was still dark as the worship began. The celebrant was on the highest point with the peak at his back, and we were in a semi-circle in front. As the consecration began the sunlight was first just edging the mountaintops. Then as the priest raised the host in blessing, sunlight glowed off the top of Mt. Sinai and the silhouette of those two hands of the host appeared to be orbed in golden light. It was so eerie that my spine just tingled.

You could not see the face or body of the celebrant, just the silhouette of both, so you could easily imagine that here was Christ himself holding up the bread of our communion. The words, "The Peace That Passes All Understanding" just flashed in my mind. By the time our worship ended and we were all bathed in sunlight with a marvelous vista spread all around us from near the top of Mt. Sinai, I had known a

wonderful, deep feeling of absolute peacefulness. This moment in time was the spiritual highlight of that whole month of study, and one of the most significant of my life. **It, like the memory of cuddling my children, is a moment to call on when I want to feel Gods Peace!**

The Rev. Cn. Laurence Larson



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