



Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time August 13, 2017

Pastor's Column

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God, "The Beyond in Our Midst"

When I was in Jerusalem in 2000 on a three-month sabbatical, the latest "intifada" began that continues to this day. At that time, I wrote these thoughts and I share them with you now in the desire that we all become more ecumenical and inter-faith in our prayer and in our religious attitudes in order to create a more peaceful world:

Last week I had the privilege to attend a prayer service for peace in the Chapel of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute. Over the years, I have attended and taken part in ecumenical prayer services, as well as interfaith services, as this one at Tantur this past week.

They have always been very meaningful, but none as meaningful as last week's. It is one thing to pray for peace when the conflict and violence is far removed. It is entirely different when you and the prayer you utter are in the midst of the conflict and violence.

Also, the prayer was made more meaningful because it was not just Jewish prayer, Muslim prayer, or Christian prayer. It was global prayer—the prayer of all the religious players who are creating this Middle East tension.

By praying in ecumenical and interfaith settings, the person allows God to expand the borders of life. God keeps pushing the envelope. And when one makes that leap of faith to allow God's activity to take place, one is never the same. And there is no going back!

When a Christian of one denomination prays with Christians of other denominations, when a Christian prays with Muslims and Jews, it is, I believe, a very special foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

There is always the need, of course, to go back home to our zones of comfort, to our own mosques, synagogues, and churches, where language, ritual, symbols, and creeds best express, for us, the Mystery that is God and Life. But we go back home only to be strengthened and nourished for the journey into the beyond to which God calls us.

In the beginning of this 21st century, "God, The Beyond in Our Midst," is calling us to new lands and places. As we continue to become a global village, will we hide in our religious ghettos? Will we allow religion to continue to divide us and to create violence and death? Will we continue an arrogance that makes absolute claims on territory and faith? Or will we allow God to be God? Will we have faith in the One who spoke to Abram, almost 4,000 years ago, who continued to speak through the ages, and speaks to us, once again, on the brink of this new millennium, "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you..." (Genesis 12:1-2).

In this shrinking world, our global village, we are becoming ever more linked by economy, travel, and communication, especially through the Internet. What are we going to do with our religions, our spiritualities? Will we stay put in our tribes or will we begin to take the steps on the journey that takes us toward a new land, a global spirituality?

F. Mike