

Ecumenical Order of Charity

Community Newsletter

Online Edition – October 2002

Letter from the Editor

Dear brothers, Sisters, Associates, and Friends:

This is beginning of the part of the calendar year I like best: October, November, and December. The weather is perfect and the holidays are thought provoking and fun. Before you know it, it will be time to mail Christmas cards! October is a big month for Charitists, Franciscans, Carmelites, and Dominicans.

Tuesday, October 1, is the **Feast of St. Therese**. The “Little Flower” died on September 30, 1897. Though Therese’s life spanned only 24 years, her faith and simplicity were considered remarkable. She was canonized in 1925, and made Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church in 1997. She is a patroness of missions. St. Therese said, “For me prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy. Finally, it is something which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus.”

The Ecumenical Order of Charity celebrates **Friday, October 4**, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, as **Animal Rights Day. Reverence**, from Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat’s book, **Spiritual Literacy** discusses one of St. Francis’s most beloved qualities – the practice of reverence for life. The sacred is in, with, and under all the things of this world. This article encourages us to respond with the appropriate respect and awe. Remember Francis’s sermon to the birds, “My brothers, birds, you should praise your Creator very much and always love him.” Francis had not yet been exposed to feminist theology!

Monday, October 7, is the **Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary**. As the story goes, Mary gave the rosary to St. Dominic as a form of devotion. Whether you are a fan of “bead rattling” or not, it is clear that many world religions have there own particular version of sacred beads. **Praying with Sacred Beads** is a meditation on God’s Presence taken from Joan Huston’s book by the same name published by Liguori/Triumph, 2000. Please feel free to adapt this meditation to whatever beads

suit your fancy: rosary, mala, Anglican. As long as we remain conscious regarding the wonders of creation and the force behind it, I doubt the form our beads take makes much difference.

Monday, October 14, Columbus Day. No one can be sure exactly how many Native Americans were living on the North American continent when Columbus arrived, but estimates are generally in the range of 9.8 to 12 million. By the year 1890, there were only 250,000 Indians left on the continent, or about two percent of the original population. After the broken treaties, after the raids, after the expansions, after dime novels that glorified the slaughter of the “Red Man,” and after the infamous words “The only good Indian is a dead Indian” (actually, “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead”) were spoken by Philip Henry Sheridan, is it any wonder that Native Americans, look with a jaundiced eye on this “holiday”? [The Ways of Civilization](#), by Chief Luther Standing Bear, Ogalala Sioux, puts it all into perspective quite nicely.

Tuesday, October 15, is the Feast of St. Teresa of Avila. Theresa wrote several works, which are considered classics of spiritual literature, including **The Way of Perfection** and **The Interior Castle**. A great mystic, a strong, intelligent and active leader, Teresa was canonized in 1622 and in 1970 became the first woman to be declared a Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church. Let’s see, a lapse of 348 years, I think it is safe to say it didn’t happen a moment too soon! Teresa said, “I don’t find anything comparable to the magnificent beauty of a soul and hits marvelous capacity. Let us consider it to be like a castle in which there are many rooms. In the center and middle is the main dwelling place where the very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place. The door of entry to the castle is prayer and reflection.”

Sunday, October 27, standard time begins. As far as I am concerned, the slogan should read “Spring forward; Fall apart.” If the people who thought this little bit of silliness up knew how much it interferes with my sleep pattern, I know they would give it up. And what’s this about Arizona not doing Daylight Saving Time? Now I really am confused!

Thursday, October 31, Halloween. Well, I’ve got 10,000 jokes about “tricks” and none about “treats”; but I will be good and spare you this year. Several years ago, Br. Dale gave me a copy of a book by Gary L. Stern entitled **A Few Tricks Along the Way: Daily Reflections for Gay Men, Queer Boys, Magnificent Queens & the People Who Love Them**. The title isn’t the only thing great about this book.

Stern has a fantastic sense of humor. Whenever I am feeling low, I read it for a lift. I thought you might enjoy reading what he has to say about [Halloween](#).

[Maintaining Community or Death \(Part 4 of 4\)](#) Excerpted from **The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace**, M. Scott Peck, M.D., Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1987. Peck is the author of **The Road Less Traveled**, **People of the Lie**, and **What Return Can I Make**. He is a Doctor of Psychiatry and cofounder of the Foundation for Community Encouragement, a nonprofit organization promoting community and world understanding.

[How the World Can Be the Way It Is](#) (Quest, 1995) by Steve Hagen is a Buddhist look at diversity and why we feel the need to proselytize others to accept our point of view. Thank God I am never guilty of this one!

[What's on the Web](#) contains a short review by Cliff Johnson taken from the 75th Anniversary Issue (1927-2002) of the **Science of Mind** magazine about an interesting website called *spiritsite*. In commemoration of Animal Rights Day, you might also want to take some time to surf the net to see if there isn't an animal rights organization to which you can lend your support. My buddy, Otis – a dachshund/beagle mix -- has been my constant companion for 12 years. I rescued him from the Tulsa SPCA, and I couldn't begin to tell you all he has rescued me from.

In closing, I would like to remind you that Br. Lou Anthony has a birthday on Thursday, October 10. And while I am on the subject, I need to beg forgiveness from Sr. Diana for forgetting her birthday on Sunday, September 22. After encouraging everyone to send her a card, I not only forgot, but I think I got the address wrong. This all takes place, of course, after she and Kath sent me a beautiful bouquet of flowers for **my** birthday! I am absolutely humiliated.

Peace,

Br. John

Every creature is full of god and is a book about God.
~ Meister Eckhart

[Maintaining Community or Death? \(Part 4 of 4\)](#)

Communities have their own life span that vary according to the reasons of their creation. Some fail to live out their potential and others degenerate when they have outlived their usefulness.

- **A community should address the question about its own death.** It will then strive more vigorously for vitality or get on with the business of healthy dying.
- **Discernment takes time.** When the spirit of the group leaves, when attendance drops, and meetings become infrequent, then death may be the right answer. A community should ask itself if it is avoiding a task on whether it no longer has a task.

Some groups attempt to stay in existence through enemy formation – they create a threat that keeps them together. (Hitler united the Germans by whipping up hatred for the Jews.)

To survive, a community must be **“for good”** rather than **“against the bad”**. The leader must lead as little as possible but keep group focus on the welfare of the whole, not of individuals. The group faces difficult, painful issues and transforms members from social creatures into community creatures.

*My brothers, birds, you should praise your Creator very
much and always love him.
~ Francis*

How the World Can Be the Way It Is

Consider how the way in which we think, speak and act frequently follows from our innate desire to get other people to believe as we believe. We proselytize others because it makes us feel better. And the reason it makes us feel better is because we're always unsure of what we believe ourselves. The Pain of this uncertainty becomes less conspicuous to us if we can lose ourselves among others of similar beliefs.

We're unsure of our beliefs because whatever we happen to believe about anything can never provide us with Certitude. All beliefs, since they are conceptual, are necessarily relative and subject to change. They do not, and cannot, provide us with the solid ground we desire. Indeed, our beliefs are actually a source of anxiety.

Having a ground, however, isn't necessary for getting to Truth – in fact, it's a definite hindrance. While we do need our stepping stones, our beliefs, to get along in the relative world, we don't need them in our search for Truth. They have no business there. They will only serve to cloud our vision and obstruct the View – supply us with false views, actually – for our beliefs amount to no more than the positing of absolutes in the mind where, with close attention to actual, direct experience, none can be found.

Still, we can see Truth. We just can't model it in our minds (or elsewhere), that's all. We cannot get to Truth by rules and regulation. Truth is directly present in the mind and needs no mediation. We either see it immediately, or we miss it entirely. This “missing it” is ignorance – our common habit of fixing upon our concepts, on that which can be formulated, born, created, modeled and held by the mind, rather than upon what is directly perceived.

We work for the protection of the environment
and the animal life of our mother earth.
We preserve all her natural resources.
TFD, The Vow of Non-Violence, (2)

Reverence

“The challenge of the saints of the 21st century,” Catholic priest Edward Hays declares, “is to begin to comprehend the sacred in the 10,000 things of our world; to reverence what we have come to view as ordinary and devoid of spirit.”

Look around. There is so much that is deserving of our respect and honor. The sacred is in, with, and under the 10,000 things of the world. And we are spiritual sleuths trying to find the fingerprints of the Subtle One.

In **The Book of Rites**, Confucius says, “Always and in everything let there be reverence.” He realizes that this is a building block of a better world.

Ecologist and philosopher Thomas Berry explains the significance of this all-encompassing attitude: “Every being has its own interior; it self, its mystery, its numinous aspect. To deprive any being of this sacred quality is to disrupt the larger order of the universe. Reverence will be total or it will not be at all.”

German dramatist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe feels that “the soul of the Christian religion is reverence.” That assessment is shared by Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., an American author who writes, ‘I have in my heart a small shy plant called reverence; I cultivate that on a Sunday morning.’”

The Jains in India consider reverence for life and nonviolence to be the lodestar of their religion. One of their prayers goes; “May I always have a friendly feeling toward all living beings in the world and may the stream of compassion always flow from my heart toward distressed and afflicted living beings.”

German Protestant theologian Jurgen Moltmann points out that reverence in our times means “defending God’s creation against human aggression, exploitation, and destruction.”

Physician and theologian Albert Schweitzer makes reverence for life the foundation of his ethics. He counsels” “Profound love demands a deep conception and out of this develops reverence for the mystery of life. It brings us close to all beings.” Schweitzer’s reverence for life enables us to honor the Friend of the World by cherishing all parts of the creation. And that includes everything from the Grand Canyon to the ant that makes its way across our path.

Ecophilosopher Henryk Skolimowski goes even further: “Reverential thinking creates a field of good energy; ultimately it is a healing thinking. Reverential thinking is not a luxury, but it is a condition of our sanity and grace.”

This ecological way of looking at the Earth and the community of life hopefully can resurrect the spirit of St. Francis, the 13th century Italian monk who rejoiced in the natural world and his role in it as a loving member of the family of living and nonliving things.

Physician Larry Dossey says: “There is only one valid way, thus, to partake of the universe – whether the partaking is of food and water, the love of another, or indeed, a pill. That way is characterized by reverence – a reverence born of a felt sense of participation in the universe, of a kinship with all others and with matter.”

We have forgotten how to be good guests,
how to walk lightly on the earth as its other creatures
do.

~ Statement of 1972 Stockholm Environmental Conference,
“Only One Earth”

The Ways of Civilization

The attempted transformation of the Indian by the white man and the chaos that has resulted are but the fruits of the white man's disobedience of a fundamental and spiritual law.

“Civilization” has been thrust upon me since the days of the reservations. It has not added one whit to my sense of justice, to my reverence for the rights of life, to my love for truth, honesty, and generosity, or to my faith in Wakan Tanka, God of the Lakotas.

For after all the great religions have been preached and expounded, or have been revealed by brilliant scholars, or have been written in fine books and embellished in fine language with finer covers, man – all man – is still confronted with the Great Mystery.

Long before I heard of Christ or saw a white man . . .
I knew God. I perceived what goodness is.
I saw and loved what is really beautiful.
Civilization has not taught me anything better!
~ Ohiyesa

Halloween

Happy Celtic New Year! A holy day celebrated by tribal Fairy people and later by the Celts as the time when the ground we walk on and the underworld collide, the spirit population emerges, and we humans are in danger of being swallowed into the realm below if we are not well disguised.

Halloween provides the perfect opportunity for us modern fairies to act out what might be. Otherwise wouldn't-be-caught-dead-in-a-dress Brooks Brothers types emerge as drop dead drag queens, having spent enough time getting ready to put the Gabor sisters to shame. I [Gary Stern] personally once appeared at a college party as a Kabuki Goddess, sat on a couch for two straight hours passing joints, and then spent who knows how long staring in the bathroom mirror intoning, “I am your dream...I am your dream...I am your dream.” I think I got laid by Rapunzel.

So there's more to this whole deal than meets the eye. A chance to delve into mysterious realms, a hallowed eve when anything might happen, a direct tie to a common pagan past that hadn't yet written off wild tricks and handsome baskets full of treats for those who acknowledge *all* the possibilities.

What do you think, the chiffon wrap or the snake wig?

Round about what is
lies a whole mysterious world of might be,
a psychological romance of possibilities and things
that do not happen.
~ Longfellow, "Table-Talk," Driftwood

What's on the Web

www.spiritsite.com – Today is truly, as someone once said, “The Information Age.” For what an immense library of information is available to us with the pressing of a few keys and a click of the mouse!

This remarkable site is one such library, where those drawn to things of the spirit will find within it a treasure house of books, art, quotations – even a daily affirmation. The designers have formed their homepage into three sections: Spiritual books, Resources, and Gallery. Each deserves a brief mention.

Click on “Spiritual Books” and you find books on self-help, world religions, and other significant subjects. Under “Resources” one can find a list of spiritual retreats or books on meditation and prayer. The Gallery” particularly intrigued me. One link led me to 16th century illuminated manuscripts, which I was able to zoom up to 200 percent to view the artwork in detail.

Those with audio capability can listen to spiritual music from several traditions. If you wish to maintain further contact, a monthly newsletter is available. Spend some time with this site. You will not regret the expense.

God nourishes everything, from the horned buffalo to nits, disdaining no creature – for if he disdained creatures due to their insignificance, they could not endure for even a moment. Rather he gazes and emanates

compassion upon them all. So should you be good to all
creatures,
disdaining none.
~ The Kabbalah

Praying with Sacred Beads

Pray: In the stillness of my soul, O my God,
I am aware of Your sacred Presence.
As I remain in Your radiation of Love
I praise you for your wonders of creation.

Your pastel ribbons of dawn (bead one)
Your hillsides of wild flowers opening to the morning sun (bead two)
Your rain-rinsed morning breezes (bead three)
Your blue ocean waves smoothing white beach sands (bead four)
Your autumn winds stripping naked the willow trees (bead five)
Your snowflakes one by one filling up the woods (bead six)
Your world under a mantel of white (bead seven)
Your spring winds unlocking the frozen streams (bead eight)
Your dusk shadowing the day sounds (bead nine)
Your stars splintering the night sky (bead ten)

The truly wise person kneels at the feet of all crea-
tures.
Mechtild of Magdeburg