

Christmas 2 2022

Imagine that you are God and you want to create a world in which people can learn and grow in the way of love.

You would, of course, want to provide them with everything they need to thrive—food, shelter, companionship—so that they can complete their journey.

These things would be widely distributed, readily available.

That is exactly how God created the world.

Eventually, however, someone gained possession of something that others did not have.

It might have been a choice piece of land, a ruby, a prize stallion.

It does not matter what it was.

What matters is the response: “That person has something the rest of us do not have.”

The thing then becomes an object of desire—I desire it not because I need it.

I desire it because you desire it; you desire it because I desire it.

We feel deprived even though it does not contribute to our survival or our thriving.

Possessing the object of desire means being the envy of others.

We therefore seek a way to gain control of it, or seek some other object that would be even more desirable—you have a ruby; I have a diamond.

It does not even matter whether the object actually *is* rare.

People must merely *think* that it is rare or somehow special.

Diamonds are plentiful, but the market is driven by the illusion of scarcity and a lot of hype about how much people desire them.

In other words, we desire things because we *think* others desire them.

Desire thus can be created out of nothing—the emperor’s new clothes.

People are even willing to fight for control of the thing desired, not because they lack food, shelter, or companionship, but because they lack this particular thing that they think others desire.

We imagine ourselves to be superior when we can possess or do what others cannot possess or do because it incites the desire of others.

We compete for “likes.”

We work hard to get more, even if it means impoverishing or enslaving others.

We lose sight of the purpose of our existence as we become enthralled by desire.

We are so busy looking elsewhere that we miss what we have right here.

Because the majority have food, shelter, and companionship, on the other hand, those things are not objects of desire.

They are devalued—taken for granted, as we say.

Having a cup of coffee with a friend is meaningless because anyone can do it.

Simply put, we lose appreciation of the things that contribute most to our well being as we compete with others to be envied.

Herod the Great seems to have been the very model of a person thus trapped in desire. He was afraid of not being the object of envy and was willing to go to great lengths to maintain his position in the eyes of the public.

He banished his first of *ten* wives and her son, for example, to marry a woman whose contacts were more useful to him.

He then had this second wife executed around nine years later when she became inconvenient.

Twenty years after that, he killed two of the sons she bore him, Alexander and Aristobulus.

The latter was a great favorite among the people because of his handsome bearing and royal descent through his mother, thus Herod, who lacked these qualities, feared him.

After the execution, Herod had the succession returned to his first son, Antipater.

Antipater should have stayed in exile, however, because, three years later, Herod had him killed and changed his will.

When the magi come to pay their respects to Jesus, the newborn king of the Jews, Herod is again envious and afraid.

Though many historians dispute it, the Bible says that Herod ordered the death of all the male babies in Jerusalem because he wanted to rid himself of Jesus.

Whether or not Herod is guilty of the slaughter of the innocents (which we commemorate on December 28 and is the subject of the hauntingly beautiful Coventry Carol), he seems to have been a man lost in desire.

We can be glad that we are not like Herod, that we can appreciate the beauty of the everyday rather than chasing after the admiration of others, because we cannot focus on both.

We can shift our attention back and forth between what we have and what we desire, but we remain weak in both areas, neither a profound appreciator of what is nor a master manipulator like Herod.

In reality, a cup of coffee with a friend is ultimately more rewarding than owning something rare, and it is available to most people.

The best things in life *are*, though we will not convince those who hoard the world's resources.

Herod will always be Herod, a creature of desire and emptiness, blind to what he is missing,

unaware that, as the artist, Brian Andreas, writes: “There are things you do because they feel right & they make no sense & they make no money & it may be the real reason we are here: to love each other & to eat each other’s cooking & say it was good.”

Jesus’ birth reminds us that God has provided us with all that we need to thrive.

It is our choice either to value God’s gifts or to value what others desire.

The more we focus on the gifts of God, the greater our joy and contentment.