

## Easter 7C 2022

People who understand in their hearts that we are one with God and that God is one with us behave differently.

One might even say that they relate differently.

Simply carrying ourselves with the heartfelt comprehension of the oneness between ourselves and God has a positive effect on others *because* those others are connected with us.

We effect those around us, and vice versa.

This is another reason that we gather as the church, to be with others who understand in their hearts that we are one.

From being together, we grow.

When we allow ourselves to be convinced that we are isolated individuals, on the other hand, we have a more negative effect on those around us.

We may protest our deep concern about things, our high beliefs, our great moral values.

We may have all sorts of *opinions*, but it is our heart that determines our effect on those around us.

People who have all the “right ideas,” but whose hearts are blind, are particularly destructive.

We may wring our hands and mourn loudly the state of affairs in the world to prove how good we are, but in the end, we only succeed in convincing those who are as alienated as ourselves.

Our actual effect is to spread our own sense of isolation and thus to hinder others from growing in their awareness of connection.

If we go so far as to think that we are not only isolated individuals, but that we do not matter, we become capable of terrible things.

Contemporary society has a serious problem with heart development.

It has turned away from what nurtures the heart—community and prayer.

We avoid face-to-face relationships and denigrate prayer as naive babble.

People believe that they can be good without either.

They believe that thinking will supply all the growth they need,

but both face-to-face relationships and prayer improve our beings—not the kind of

prayer that turns God into Santa Claus in the sky, mind you, but prayer that seeks communion, connection.

Sacred love connects us; connection enables love.

This is not a matter of the head.

God does not, in other words, love us like we love a thing outside.

We do not truly love what has no connection with us.

What we really mean when we say we love such a thing is that we like the benefits we get from it.

People even say they love people as things outside themselves, as objects, but really, they mean that they like what they get from these people.

As Christ noted, even the gentiles are good to their friends because their friends serve their purpose.

If that should stop, the “relationship” will end.

This is not the connection of which we are speaking.

Those who see themselves as separate, as utter individuals, can only hope for a positive *exchange* with others.

They are looking to benefit, not to grow mutually.

A true friend helps not to get something in return, but because she recognizes that you are one with her.

Those who are disconnected seek to demonstrate their individuality in every instance because it is all that they have.

Gluten intolerance affects 0.7% of Americans,<sup>1</sup> but roughly 33% claim to be gluten intolerant.<sup>2</sup>

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1 <https://www.healthline.com/health/gluten-intolerance-test>

2 <https://www.livescience.com/59011-gluten-avoidance-different-countries.html>

People are beginning to decline even commonly accepted vaccines for their children.<sup>3</sup>

In the absence of feeling connected to others and to God, this is the only way they can feel special.

It is all people have.

Whether it is absurdly expensive nonsense products on Goop or vegan cleanse and detox, it is about feeling special when all people feel is isolated, in competition with others.

Public discourse is now about “my freedom” and “my rights” rather than “what is best for us?”

We no longer understand that, in helping others, we are helping ourselves.

We think of things in terms of economic exchange rather than mutual growth.

Individualists misunderstand the nature of love as meaning “I have to do what you want if I love you.”

When we love people as God loves us, we recognize that we are in them and they are in us and we are in God.

Jesus tells us that we are all united in God, all part of God.

To love is to say “You and I are united, thus our well being is connected.”

It is Jesus’ earnest desire that his disciples grasp this in their hearts.

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3 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/magazine/anti-vaccine-movement.html?searchResultPosition=1>

In other words, it is his prayer, as we heard in today's gospel.

It is not possible to understand fully what it is like to embrace connection until one has experienced it first hand.

When a person who senses that we are one engages with a person who sees himself as an independent being, some caution is advised.

In a somewhat comical passage of Acts, Paul and Silas get into trouble in Philippi for casting out an unrelenting spirit that allowed a slave to tell fortunes and thus enrich her master.

By casting out the spirit, Paul frees the slave from economic exploitation.

Had the master understood that we are one, he would not have complained, but he cared only about the decrease in revenue.

Rather than being happy for her, he is furious about his loss and complains to the authorities.

Paul might have been more cautious, but I suspect Paul knew and did not care.

It was ultimately an act of compassion, after all, and God can work with anything.

Once Paul and Silas are thrown into the depths of the jail, God simply opens the doors with an earthquake.

A person who does not listen carefully to the Spirit might think that this was a sign that they should leave the jail.

On other occasions, after all, Paul worked hard to escape punishment.

He reminded his tormentor, for example, that he was a Roman citizen, but each situation is unique and requires a different response.

The Holy Spirit guides us, and Paul is not deaf to the Spirit's nudging.

This time, he does not resist arrest, does not leave the jail.

Paul surely had no idea where it would all lead.

(He had, after all, cast out the divining spirit that could have told him.)

He was listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and watched, step by step, as the Spirit's purpose unfolded.

As he looks around to see why the Spirit is not urging them to leave the cell, he observes that the jailor is despairing.

Paul tells him that they are still there.

Unlike the owner of the slave, the jailor is open to growth.

He recognizes that Paul and Silas are different from the man making the accusation.

They are not just interested in personal benefit (which is the contrast that this story is making), and he asks them to teach him.

The jailor enters the way of love.

Knowing how important a sense of our being one is, Jesus therefore prays: “I ask not only on behalf of [my disciples], but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one.”

“Through their word” is an interesting expression.

Here, “word” might be better translated as sense, reason, or even purpose.

Jesus wants to reach all those whose sense or purpose can be changed from selfishness to recognizing themselves as a member of the one.

“As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.”

Of course, we already are; Jesus just wants to make sure we sense it so that, as he puts it,

“the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

When we have a *sense* of our being one in God and God’s being in us, we resonate differently; we affect those around us in a more positive way, even when we are not actively attempting to change them.

We should not underestimate the power of our sense of oneness in the face of disunity, horror, and a world dedicated to selfishness.

Nor should we be deterred from pursuing our program of face-to-face relations and prayer.

It is the most transformative project I know.