



Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Pastor's Column

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Toward a Global Spirituality

It has been reported that there is a species of fish that lives in the waters off the South American continent that has the ability, with its one set of eyes, to see in two directions—up and down—at the same time.

As it makes its way through the water, it simultaneously looks down into the murky depths and looks upward to the sunlight piercing the water's surface!

Looking in two opposite directions at the same time is, for the human, visually impossible; but attitudinally achievable. Indeed, looking in two directions at the same time is essentially necessary in developing a global spirituality.

As one begins to participate with others ecumenically and inter-religiously, as one begins to ask the other, "What do you believe?" "Why do you practice this ritual?" and "How does this doctrine have meaning for you?", then the very same questions will be asked of you.

If you do not have the answers, you know that you must quickly search for them. Thus, the quest for knowledge about the other denomination or the other religion automatically becomes a quest for knowledge of one's own religion, one's own denomination. The more that one looks outward, the more one will need to look inward. Living ecumenically and inter-religiously, one imitates that fish and looks in two different directions at the same time.

A global spirituality has its beginnings in the person's willingness to simply gain knowledge and information about others and about oneself. It is about looking for those values that we have in common as religious people. It is looking for the common meanings that lie beyond the words, rituals, and symbols found in our different religions.

One must be willing to live with seeming contradiction, confusion, and doubt. One must be willing to let go of quick answers and comfortable categories. One must not see "the other" as an object of conversion (bringing the other to my way of thinking or my structured belief system), but seeing the other as a fellow human being trekking up the same mountain to God, traversing a different path.

As we begin to reverence one another, as we speak each other's words, and as we participate in each other's rituals, we will begin to see and understand our own religion and denomination in fresh and revitalized ways.

Developing a spirituality that is global will allow individuals to live within their own creeds and ritual practices, while respecting those of the other. The spirituality becomes the connector, the link, and the space "in-between" where we find God in a newer and more intimate way. That "in-between" space is "the Beyond in Our Midst" where God is found. That "in-between" space may, indeed, even be God.

As we gather together in so many ways with family and friends, we are mindful that we are rich in our diversity. Even among our own immediate families, we are becoming ever more diverse—different ethnic, racial, religious backgrounds—as the family grows and marries.

Take advantage of all these differences. See them as opportunities to grow spiritually. Take time to get to know the other as a fellow human being, not an object of conversion. Let discussion of these various differences be bridges to bring us closer together. Whatever your religious backgrounds and beliefs, find God in the "in-between" places and spaces!

F. Mike