

## Why Jesus Came

2/7/13

Jesus said he came to save “the lost children of Israel” (Mt. 15:24.) Why were they lost—these people for whom he came? They were lost because their leaders had lost the way which God through Moses had set out for them.—And so it is now. The Catholic Church claims to be the fullest manifestation of the way to God which Jesus established. But the realities speak differently. Our leaders, from soon after the beginning, have repeatedly taken us away from Jesus, beginning with the secularization of the Church in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century—its involvement in political power. When this happened, the Church filled itself with hierarchy, bureaucracy, restrictions of all sorts on the people, an emphasis on personal sin (the operative method still used by the Church) rather than on God’s invitation to salvation in Christ (the method taught by the Apostles). The Church murdered millions in the name of Jesus, and declared a host of enemies for itself: heretics, Albigensians living peacefully, Moslems, Jews, Protestants, and during the middle ages, no end of kings and secular potentates, as well as the crew of French bishops who stole the Pope to Avignon. And most recently, the Catholic faithful have been betrayed by many of their bishops and allegedly by the current and previous popes in the sex-abuse scandal.

Jesus came to save the people of Israel from the rule-bound regimentation of Pharisaic Judaism, which had nothing to do directly with loving God, and to expose the hypocrisy of the leaders who not only misdirected those in their charge, but who—according to Jesus—knew nothing of God themselves, only of the rules they allied themselves with (Mt. 15:7-9.)

Likewise, Jesus comes to *us* in the purity of Word and Eucharist, and frees us from the burdens which Catholic religion imposes on us—threats of sin-guilt, obligations, punishments—in order to turn our attention toward our true place, our place in God. For the purpose of religion is just that. Religion is a path; it is a way. The only purpose of genuine religion is to open and to clarify the way toward finding our place in God. Genuine religion does not exist for itself nor to serve itself. Its purpose is never to burden the soul nor to impede it on its way toward God, as all souls are, in one way or another. In whatever ways any religion turns a soul away from its yearning for God or deters the person from his growth in godliness, the religion fails and is good

for nothing. And so in our context, whenever a conflict arises in us between the demands of Catholic regulations and the joy of heart-in-God, we must always go toward the latter, our only home.

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Jesus came to deliver to his people the two great commandments, to love God and to love one another (Mt. 22:37-40). These two commands are the essence—and thus the continuation—of the Mosaic Law. Jesus was all about surrender—giving yourself to God in loving openness to his will, and giving yourself freely to the other for the well-being of the other. That’s the sum of it. His purpose, his intention, was that those two commands should be the pillars of a community—a universal community of justice and peace. Israel was to be the incubator for this communal way of life, led in love of God and service to others. Israel was to be the origin of this community as it spread across the planet. That is the Divine Plan and Intention for Creation.

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Jesus was no chauvinist. He didn’t come to exalt one religion over another. He didn’t believe in a “Chosen People” (cf. Luke 4:25-27. Indeed, the Baptist proclaims, “God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.” (Lk. 3:8.)) Jesus believed in love, openness, and forgiveness. He understood loving God to mean being completely open to the urgings of God within the person. (“I have told you everything I have heard from my Father” (Jn. 15:15.)) Jesus taught that God created everything, all people, and provides for them—the evil as well as the good (Mt. 5:15). God is the source of everything. Our response is to be simple, receptive openness to the Spirit of God. When we love as God loves, then we will have met the standard Jesus sets for us. (“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48).)

We cannot have love for God unless we also have love for those creatures whom God loves. We must love our neighbors. Jesus doesn’t mean here simply those in our community. He wasn’t talking about Jews loving only other Children of Abraham. (“Do not the pagans do the same?” (Mt. 5:47).) We must love everyone, even our enemies. The pertinent parable here is the Good Samaritan story (Lk. 10:29 ff.)

No one can love and give himself fully to a person he feels superior to. Jesus did not come to preach the superiority of any person or religion. (“Do not be called rabbi” (Mt. 23:8).) Jesus taught an egalitarian way of love. Even the father in Jesus’ story humbled himself by running to greet his prodigal son who had so greatly offended him (Lk. 15:11 ff). And Jesus taught that the master will put on the apron and serve his servant (Lk. 12:37.).

Any religion, then, that propounds its superiority over any other, or any people or community that does so, cannot call itself Christian and does not know the way of Jesus. We must not strive to compete with one another nor to best one another’s arguments. Rather, we must meet each other as brothers and sisters to share our faith and our knowledge of God. That is the way of respectful justice, which is a prerequisite to peace.

Let us simply follow Jesus in humility, truthfulness, and loving service.

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Jesus did not come to evangelize but to heal. Those who were ill or deformed, he made physically whole. Those who suffered the demons of their guilt, he forgave their sins. Those who loved him by their actions, he loved in return and he praised.

Jesus is the loving source of love. If we know this in our hearts—if Jesus lives in our hearts—then let us spend our lives imitating him in loving, consoling, befriending—healing—others, rather than wasting our time talking mere words and trying to convince these others of where or what they should be.

Often such talky evangelizers are people of shaky faith who try to evangelize others in order to solidify their own faith. Indeed, one can convert the world without loving God himself. Such a person is indeed “a resounding gong, a clashing cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Less talk, more love. Less No, more Yes.

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Jesus came as a sure statement of God’s love for us. He healed, and he urged his followers to heal each other. He freed us of guilt by his forgiveness, and in this way he urged us

to do the most difficult thing—to pay the price and forgive others. He gave his life as a testimony to the depth of God’s love for us, and he called us to witness to our knowledge of our place in God by giving our lives to the work of securing the well-being of others.

Jesus did not come to make a religion or any kind of institution. He came to establish and perpetuate a people of love—the People of God, the Body of Christ.

When will we stop talking about our “faith,” studying it, pondering the theological depths, evangelizing others without knowing deeply our own place in God, preaching, teaching, ceremonializing, regulating, passing moral judgment—when will we stop all these distractions and simply find our place in God and love each other by serving each other, quietly, openheartedly, graciously, respectfully?

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For Jesus, everything was simple. Not easy, but simple. Life was not ponderous. Not without suffering, but not empty or meaningless. For Jesus, God is everything; God is all there is. And so it is for us. We are nothing except the love of God called by God into being as unique individuals, created for the purpose of living out the love which we are, and created by the Father as a gift to the Son (Col. 1:16).

Jesus wasn’t concerned with theology, with judging, with free will, with the conditions for mortal sin, with the intricacies of making moral judgments and proclamations. He wasn’t interest in ceremonies for their own sake, or in rituals or celebrations except as they make God present among the people. For Jesus, God is all there is. For him, God was not only present to him every moment. But as a man, he recognized that he was nothing more than an individual human expression of God’s love (a “Son of Man”) in a universe permeated by God’s love. So in the gospels, Jesus never expresses great awe and jubilant ceremonial celebration of God. God is not some kind of marvel to contemplate. God is not a tremendous awesome power to strike fear or awe or prostrational reverence in us. God is not some grand, special being. Rather, God is all that is—and more. It is we, since our Source is God, who are special. For God has chosen us to be.

Jesus lived in God's presence every moment. God was for Jesus—and is for us—there all the time. We all live, as Jesus lived, within God. No need for great spiritual ceremoniousness. No need for awe and trembling and breast-beating and penitential humiliations.—Not that God is to be taken for granted.—Rather, the truth is that God is everywhere, always. God is the constant matrix of our lives, as God was of Jesus' life.—It is not that God is nothing. It is that we live in sacred time and space, filled with God because we are made of nothing other than God's love.

No need for Halleluiahs and Hosannas. What is necessary is to recognize our nothingness and God's everythingness, and to surrender ourselves each moment to God's use—to live lovingly and to behave lovingly toward others.

That's why Jesus came.

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