

The Gifts of Darkness

Whatever it is that ties all living ones together, that Presence that pushes outward between things, between light and darkness, between the word thought and the word uttered, between each breath, between immense anguish and the smile of gratitude, between the loss of everything and the hope for everything, call it mystery, call it the Holy, call it the Christ, call it the bond between us, whatever you call it, it is the thin thread, visible and invisible, that ties us all together.

For many thousands of years Salish Peoples have been gathering during this dark time of year, first in caves, then in cedar longhouses. Their hope was to renew their hearts with prayers, songs, teachings, and stories that reminded them who they were and connected them securely with all of their help coming to them from the unseen and seen world.

Still today Salish Peoples gather all winter pushing back the night with the power and warmth of their longhouse fires and reaffirming their concern and care for the good of all living ones. In doing this sacred work they bind their hearts together in remembrance of all their Beloved who have gone ahead into the next world. All of this is considered sacred and necessary. Fishing and hunting have been completed and now is the time to await the sun and the rebirth of life on this earth.

The best in us was the best in our grandparents, great-grandparents, and ancestors. This must be acknowledged and the work that they entrusted to us to take care of our families and all living ones must be carried out. Otherwise, there will never be the reach and rise of fern and cedar, nor the swiftness of salmon and orca, nor the running of deer and elk, nor the flight of ducks and geese, and the life of all animal beings. Their lives are inextricably tied to our lives in an endless net of

Reflection by Patrick J. Twohy, SJ

"The Gifts of Darkness: An Advent Evening of Prayer" | Tuesday 12 December 2017
The Ignatian Spirituality Center and Seattle First Baptist Church

relationships in both the seen and unseen world that breathes with the motion of the stars and the entire universe. "Coast Salish elders often say, "If the salmon disappear, we will disappear."

Our coming together here at this time of year has a meaning beyond our comprehension that we too easily loose in our solitary comfort. Who we are and what we are is known only in our relationships with others, our total inter-dependency in our act of life, which is both our strength in struggle and our ultimate joy.

The real miracle is being here at all. Appearing, disappearing, alert or sleepy, stingy or generous, one second here and the next second in the world beyond. How important then it is to notice all living ones around us who for a moment accompany us here and eventually into the world to come. So everyone and each moment is important in an ultimate sense. We are all rich or poor, tiny or large, held for a moment here in this wonder. We cannot separate out the good and the bad, the difficult and the easy; it all happens here at the same time.

We live what we consider normal days with all their joys and drudgery, knowing that in less than an eye blink we could shift worlds. So then it is so important to study the life around and in us, asking only to learn to be more attentive and forgiving, more open and unafraid. A day spent in doubt, fear and procrastination, is a waste of the gift we share with all living ones. When we lose focus and concentration, we miss the music and meaning of the universe of living ones continually communicating with us. So off with the head phones and close the glaring screens! It is we who must learn to appreciate all the forms of life that hold us.

There is no greater mystery than the gift of life itself with its endless wonder, and we get to participate in it, each of us one small thread in an endlessly unfolding

Reflection by Patrick J. Twohy, SJ

"The Gifts of Darkness: An Advent Evening of Prayer" | Tuesday 12 December 2017
The Ignatian Spirituality Center and Seattle First Baptist Church

tapestry that is the universe itself. To have been given the opportunity to be part of this unfolding is a sacred gift, and infinitely generous and kind.

Even in the midst of our deepest encounters with one another we have a deep, over-riding awareness at the edges of our minds that all is given, shared with us for this moment of time. Our thoughts, words, and gestures proceed from something, a Presence, and all-encompassing knowing that doctors our hearts into understanding that we are held, embraced, guided, in our total human fragility.

There is a sense of unworthiness in all of this, for we know that we don't give all of this to ourselves, we are simply given wisdom and our acts of love as the moment and needs of the moment arise.

This awareness is truly humbling. It places us here on this earth, in the vast universe, as fellow-travelers with all living ones, knowing we do nothing, claim nothing, just in ourselves. We are simply claimed and given by a love beyond our comprehension. No matter what happens during our sojourn in this universe, this will always be true. It will be only in our passage into the next world that we will know the depth and breadth of the hearts, arms, and hands that held and guided us.

We really have only one duty in life. We must share what has been shared with us. Nothing else makes any sense at all. No other way of life could give us so much joy.

We are like large wooden rain barrels that fill to overflowing with the winter rains. Over many years the curved oak slates that round the barrel sag and separate, releasing even more water down the sides of the barrel. Eventually, the sides of the barrel fail altogether and all of the water flows out to nourish the earth and all living ones.

Reflection by Patrick J. Twohy, SJ

"The Gifts of Darkness: An Advent Evening of Prayer" | Tuesday 12 December 2017
The Ignatian Spirituality Center and Seattle First Baptist Church

The rain that fills us is the very life of the Most Holy. It is the compassion poured into our heart by the Spirit. There is no containing it. There is just the sharing of it as it fills us. This gift within us remains constant in our lives, even as our bodies wear down. In sickness and health, honor and dishonor, weakness and strength, in our decreasing ability to do all that we hoped to do, this Presence, this compassion, continues to fill us to overflowing. Until finally we can no longer contain it at all, and all of this love pours out to all living ones in the seen and unseen world and we finally become one with all that have held us from the moment we were born.

Reflection by Patrick J. Twohy, SJ

"The Gifts of Darkness: An Advent Evening of Prayer" | Tuesday 12 December 2017
The Ignatian Spirituality Center and Seattle First Baptist Church