

# Carrying our darkneses as we walk to the light

CCP USER / 02 OCTOBER 2017 / HITS: 93

JOURNEY TOWARD HOLINESS

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The Noah's Ark story, says Franciscan Richard Rohr, has an element most people never notice: after the animals enter the ark, God closes them in together (Gen 7:16) — God puts all the natural animosities, all the opposites together, and holds them in one place.

Rohr goes on to say: I used to think it was about balancing all the opposites within me, but slowly I have learned that is actu-

ally “holding” things in their seemingly unreconciled state that widens and deepens the soul. We must allow things to be only partly resolved, without perfect closure or explanation (Rohr, daily meditation, 8/30/2017).

This insight seems to me very good advice for our journey to holiness. It applies on a lot of levels. Staring with the self, we want to be the best people possible but, really, that is impossible. St Paul laments that he does what he does not want to do, and fails to do that which he knows he should. We all have them — impulses inside ourselves that are not godly. As we grow in holiness, we learn first not to act on them, and then to direct them properly. For example, we always have a certain amount of pride. First we learn not to brag (at least not too much!); then as we mature, we are able to give praise and thanks to God and acknowledge indebtedness to others for our accomplishments. But the tendencies to self-congratulation, to comparing ourselves favorably to others, to showing off in some way will be with us until we die. So with all of our ungodly impulses. They live side by side in our souls with our desires to be godly. Suppression of these impulses does not work. Instead we must try to hold our darkneses gently “in their unreconciled state,” letting them prompt us to advance in our spiritual life by acknowledging them honestly and moving on.

Relationships also must take account of the “unreconciled opposites within me.” In marriages, or in living in a religious community as I do, we must deal gently with the darkneses in those we live with, and trust them to do the same for us. Otherwise relationships cannot endure through conflict and over time.

In this tumultuous time, cultures also must learn this wisdom. Historical actors had unreconciled opposites in their actions. We celebrate our USA Founding Fathers, but some owned slaves; Columbus Day calls to mind that the Europeans, who discovered and colonized the Americas, had attitudes and practices toward the Native Americans that we find reprehensible today. When we embrace positive ideals like religious freedom and individual liberty and multiculturalism, we are also embracing the darkneses out of which they emerged. These darkneses remain in cultures, as do the losses they caused. Cultures, like people, will always have these unredeemed aspects which cannot be suppressed but can be surpassed.

And our own beloved religion also has unreconciled darkneses. We name them but we cannot make them disappear. If we love the Church, we love it with its darkness as well as its light.

Jesus told the parable about the wheat and weeds. Perhaps this is the New Testament metaphor corresponding to the Ark. Like the mix of animals thrown together in the ark, or the wheat and weeds growing together, we become holy as we carry these unresolved tensions and conflicts. They lead us to the kind of mature love that forgives, and in forgiving, this love accepts the limits of the perfection that can be realized in the self, in relationships, in cultures and in Church. And so we let the unreconciled opposites live together with our desires for God, not giving into dismay but persisting in hope.

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