

Dear People Whom God Loves,

Birth of Jesus Brings Hope for Everyone

There are two points that I want to make. The first is that everyone counts. The paths that we have are very different. Some are much more difficult than others. Some seem to be more valuable than others. I want to give you my opinion that that is not accurate.

The second is that we can all love ourselves and that most of us do not.

I

I will repeat a story about a Jewish Rabbi and use the example of the jigsaw puzzle to illustrate that everyone counts.

A

This Rabbi knew that Moses was a great and good person. The Rabbi was so taken with Moses, that he hoped that God would make him be like Moses. That was his daily prayer. He prayed day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. Finally, God appears to him and asks him why he keeps saying this prayer. The Rabbi says, "Because Moses was such a great, wonderful man."

God replies to the Rabbi, "I already had a Moses. I need you."

Every one of us is one of God's kids. God wants, and I would even say that in a mysterious way, needs each one of us. Everyone counts. I think of God as something like mom and dad when their teenage kids are out with the car, especially the first time but also each time. They don't rest easy until they hear the door open and their kids are home safe.

I use this metaphor to point to the infinite love that God is and to give a hint of the love that is, and is for all of us. God can't rest easy until all of her/his kids are home safe.

We can't overestimate the depth of love that God is. God is beyond any love that we can think of.

No matter how different our path is, no matter how horrible our sin is, we can always know that God is on our side. If we, with God's help, open our hearts even the tiniest crack, the love that God is

will flow in us. There is never a time that we have to give up hope. "That you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust." Mt 6,45.

B

I will now use the metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle. When the puzzle is put together, it is a beautiful face. The puzzle is finished only when all of the pieces are put together. The pieces are all different. Some pieces are large, some are small. They all have different shapes. The puzzle is finished only when all of the pieces are put together. Only then can we say, it is finished.

We are all pieces of the puzzle. Some of us will be like St. Mother Teresa. Some of us will be kind of good and kind of bad, some of us will really be huge sinners. Like the pieces of the puzzle, we are all quite different. We are all essential. When God has them all put together, we are the beautiful face that resembles the face of God.

We all want to finish the puzzle. I think of God as not resting until the Reign of God is complete. We are all God's kids. God is the infinite mommy and daddy.

What is crucial is not to judge how important or unimportant our path seems to be but that we live our path with love.

II

I think that most of us don't love ourselves. When we truly love ourselves, we will be able to see ourselves as we really are. We will see our sins, failures, shortcomings and a whole bunch of negative things. At the same time, we will see our goodness. The goodness that we see is the loving presence of God that makes us be. The fact that we exist means that that loving presence is holding us in existence. That is why we say the God created us and everything from nothing. God, who is existence, shares existence with creatures, from the big bang until now, until the universe as we know it is gone.

We need to become aware of that goodness. That indeed is who we really are. When we are aware of that goodness, we will find it easier to see and accept that we sin, make mistakes and so often miss the mark. That goodness is still there.

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We sometimes confuse self-esteem with loving ourselves. Self-esteem is valuable. It can help us to accomplish things in our world. Self-esteem often has its beginning in childhood. "Mary, you did so well in your tennis match, I am proud of you. John, you did so well in track. I am so proud of you."

Notice that we are not helping them see their goodness inside. We help them see what they have accomplished. This is good for their self-esteem. That is valuable. However, it easily becomes the driving force in our life. It can lead for needing to make millions of dollars, to have more and more prestige, to become more and more famous. There is never enough. It easily becomes an inflated ego. When we are

under this power, we will become self-centered, which is the opposite of loving ourselves. We will find it hard to see our imperfections. We will be living out a false self. We will not see our goodness. There is much in our culture that feeds our false self. Self-esteem and loving ourselves are quite different.

When we love ourselves, we will not be so proud. We will be grateful for the gift from God. Our need to look good will gradually lessen.

Notice that the great saints always acknowledge that they are sinners. They are blessed to not have the need to look good.

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There is a little exercise that I find helpful. It takes a while for it to bear fruit. Look in the mirror. Look ourselves in the eyes. Be aware of our limitation and sins. At the same time be aware that the love that God is, is who we really are. Then say to ourselves: I love you.

This may sound weird, but it works.

I think that the lack of self-love is behind very successful people, who in midlife are feeling empty inside. This happens because our spirit has not been nourished. When our spirit is not nourished, we are prone to fill the emptiness with unhealthiness. There are addictions that come from this. Addictions are not just drugs and alcohol. It can take many forms. We become our worst enemy.

When we love ourselves we will not be empty. We will also love others.

Remember: Jesus said "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Smile, God Loves You,

Father Clay

p.s. As I finish this, I notice my own silly pride.

