

January 11, 2021

There is in Catholic Christianity explicitly and all of Christianity implicitly, at least, the expectation of what is called, A second Coming of Christ, as in Christ Has Died, Christ Has Risen, Christ Will Come Again.

Most commonly this is offered as a coming to judge, a “last judgment” that an awful, and I do mean awful, an awful lot of Christian and Catholic practice is premised on, with all of the hellfire and brimstone that wound up preachers and misguided catechism teachers have mustered over the ages.

All of the great medieval and quite a few of the not-so-great churches of the Middle Ages have “last judgement doorways” with graphic suffering depicted in delicate stone.

Less grand churches had on the inner side of the exit wall, graphic “doom” paintings depicting all of the various and sundry human adventures that could get you assigned to hell for all eternity to remind the folks as they left that they would get away with nothing.

But in the oldest and best of Catholic Tradition, the “coming again,” the Second Coming, is about fulfillment and not judgement in our conventional understanding of that word.

Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God or the Reign of God not a “last judgement” but a future completion, a final redemption, a healing, a banquet, and if you take the Gospel of John seriously an indwelling in the most intimate manner.

I have found that talking with young people about their maturing sexuality and experiences with love from the vantage point of the intimacy of the language that Jesus uses particularly in the Gospel of John, they are open to understand their quest for love in sexual fulfillment and the insistence of their desire as a presence of God, the Divine Lover, in their lives and relationships.

Saint Bonaventure the great Franciscan saint taught this in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, as did many of the mystics but we have opted for the interpretation of much of human sexuality through the lens of sin and judgement as if sex was one of God’s colossal mistakes like zucchini or yellow squash.

Eschatology from the Greek, the last, most remote, uttermost, final, is the word that has come to be used to describe this aspect of Christian and Catholic belief, but that word has often been narrowed to mean only what is called, “the four last things,” death, judgement, heaven, hell.

But, I do not think, that is not very consistent with the depth of the teachings of Christ regarding the works of God and the working of God in completing creation, in fulfilling the hope that of the three things that last-faith, hope, and love-and the greatest of these is love (1Corinthians 13: 13).

So what we look at, in my mind, is the universal realization of love as our last thing, what will become manifest on that “last day” that we speak of in every funeral liturgy is love.

I have told you before that I keep a list in a book of Rilke’s poetry of the children that I have been privileged to serve at the time of their deaths. I do not want to forget them and if I do not want to forget them, the source of my desire to remember, Christ, surely does not forget.

As so many of us feel that given our isolation, confinement, and distancing whatever time we have left is being wasted and we are missing opportunities and occasions of communion and presence with those we love and care about, I want to ask you to consider our plight through the lens of eschatology.

I have come to believe with Saint John Chrysostom “that when those we whom we love and lose are no longer where they were before. They are now wherever we are” and I think that resurrection is more about the gathering up of all love that went before us this day this hour this minute, a gathering up just like the fragments of loaves and fishes in those 12 baskets and carried ahead of us.

Resurrection is the restoration, maybe a better term a recapitulation, a revisiting, a gathering up of all love in One as Christ has said in the Book of Revelation chapter 12 and following, “Look I am coming soon and bringing my reward with me to repay all people for what they have done. I am the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.”

I understand this as being about love, the purifying power of God's love, not about a cruel and harsh judgement.

It is inconceivable to me that no matter how wrong we get love in this life, God's love will abandon us when we die. I know all of the stuff about free will and I do not think it possible no matter how damaged and dysfunctional we are that the redemptive love of Christ cannot overcome and heal and restore the damage and hurt that we have afflicted others with.

I do not have grandchildren, but I do have lots of people in my life, young now and once upon a time much younger, and I would love to see how love plays out in their lives, what their children will be like and how they will be when they are my age.

But I have no doubt that they will want to know how the love of their grandchildren and it goes on as it has gone one, at least I believe that.

I have buried many young people and seen what appears to be the limits of their love, but I believe that their love like the loves of our ancestors lives on in all that they have loved and all who have loved them.