

November 10, 2020

I was never a Jeopardy fan just because I wasn't but lots of you were and are, and I can understand how you must grieve the death of Alex Trebek. All of the tributes on ABC, especially, give us the presence of a kind and sensitive man who tried to make life interesting for other people and did it in a very generous and authentic manner for 37 years.

I think that Jeopardy on the one hand was an appeal to pride and a sense of superiority that we all want because one was smarter than others but not unlike Wheel of Fortune, Jeopardy appealed to our curiosity, our appetite to discover something that we did not know before. In gentle ways both shows can promote growth and change.

The contestants on Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune can be surrogates for our own needs and desires, just as we project our needs and desires on athletes and celebrities and politicians.

The Gospel readings for these last Sundays of November are all from the 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel and they present a critique of inauthentic Christianity and inauthentic Christians/Catholics.

We have never been taught to be curious about the meaning of parables, to use the Gospel texts as present time resources for criticism of our assumptions about God, religion, ourselves and our times. We have never been taught to believe in ourselves as capable of being really and truly loved by the Great Mystery that we call "God."

In these Gospel stories this month, we hear and read of wise and foolish virgins, a traveling master and the investments he leaves to his servants, and, finally, sheep and goats and the, so called, "last judgement," all of those images used in those stories are designed to make us feel a bit uncomfortable and challenge our conceptions, our ideas, about ourselves in relationship to love and the Great Mystery that we call "God". Because it is so, so easy to get it wrong, to get the basic essential message wrong.

There are so many factors that go into assembling the self that we become and for people brought up in intentionally religious families like most of ours, the

Church played a very important and significant role, a role often left unexamined and a role that is rarely given any critical thought.

I was never taught until half-way through my life that I needed to be critical of my religious beliefs and my religious assumptions, many people are never taught that and never grow in their faith or religious beliefs beyond a grammar school experience.

Healthy and authentic Catholicism begins and ends with love, not the word, not a nice feeling, but a concrete and firm love of ourselves, and that is extremely difficult to find and hold onto, it always has been.

Do you agree with that? That loving yourself is difficult and very challenging?

I just think of the role that fear has played in my formal faith formation and the shaping of the assumptions that inform my view of the world, myself, and other people. The distorted understanding of God and Christ that I was given. God being more like Santa Clause who knows if I have been naughty or nice and Christ being that man who died for my "sins.," with nary a look or listen to what was said in the actual Biblical texts.

The Bible was compressed into either a life of Christ that was all in the past or self-serving ideologies that propped up political and cultural values and customs such as the inferiority of women and the inequality of accidental ethnic and racial characteristics.

Much of Christian history is filled with the promotion of miracles with no real point, miracles that may or may not happen again, promoting a Christian life as a kind of bingo, prayer being only a means of hedging bets, never thanksgiving, with the acknowledgment that God knows what we need before we ask as Christ teaches but his disciples often do not.

So, in this day and age with all of the rage and anger and vitriol and fear that we are dealing with it is no wonder that we find it impossible to believe that love has any real power nor any real place in our conversations.

Remember that the Catholic Church teaches in Gaudium and Spes, Joy and Hope, On the Church in the Modern World, but Catholics do not always believe

that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God does the work of God flying under the radar of conventional religion.