



December 30, 2018 - Healing our Likeness to God Given By Rev. Mattei

The positive being that emerges from you and me [is] the image of God. The problem is that this image has been distorted by the emotional programs for happiness and over-identification with false values or groups so that the purity and power and beauty of who we really are is kind of hidden with layers of false self, both conscious and unconscious. So the spiritual journey aims at that. —Thomas Keating¹

The 13th century German theologian, Meister Eckhart, talking about the disciplines for a spiritual life in Christ (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Tim 4:7-8) once said:

My work is to free
myself of myself
so that You can be
born in me.²

Franciscan friar and author, Richard Rohr, raises a good question: “How do we first see and then practice our unique image of God, our Original Goodness? Paul gives us an answer. He says, ‘There are only three things that last, faith, hope, and love’ (1 Cor 13:13).” This positive anthropology redirects our focus on what God has done and is doing in us, calling us back to that original image rather than focusing on our distorted likeness ([1 Peter 5:10-11](#)).

As Martin Luther affirmed, we are “saints and sinners at the same time”, but we spend much time and energy focusing on the sinner part our reality and at working on “being good” and getting frustrated at our inability to be so. Or we bask in the notion that we are saints, and superficially and even arrogantly skip over the importance of strengthening our resolution to follow Jesus and persevere in our spiritual disciplines:

¹ Thomas Keating, *Healing Our Violence Through the Journey of Centering Prayer*

² Jon M. Sweeney and Mark S. Burrows, *Meister Eckhart’s Book of the Heart: Meditations for the Restless Soul* (Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc.: 2017), 35.

moral virtues are our response to the grace of God. It is all about what we focus on, God or ourselves, saints or sinners. The redeeming and sanctifying love of God in Christ given to us through the Holy Spirit empowers us from within and allows us to grow in awareness and responsible love of neighbor.

From the very beginning, faith, hope, and love are planted deep within our nature—indeed they are our very nature (Romans 8). But we have to awaken, allow, and advance this core identity by saying a conscious yes to it and drawing upon it as a reliable and Absolute Source. Our image of God imprinted in us at creation needs healing. Being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) gives everyone an equal and inherent dignity. However, in every age and culture, we have seen regressions toward racism, sexism, homophobia, militarism, ableism, and classism: in one way or another, we may all have played a part in degrading social interactions. Paul warns us: “God punishes wicked conduct: He has called you to share His holiness. You must have nothing to do with impurity.” (1 Thessalonians 4:6-7)

Our saying “yes” to implanted faith, hope, and love plays a crucial role in the divine equation; human freedom matters. Mary’s yes seemed to be essential to the event of Incarnation ([Luke 1:38](#)). God does not come uninvited. God and grace cannot enter without an opening from our side, or we would be mere robots. God does not want robots, but lovers who freely choose to love in return for love. And toward that supreme end, God seems quite willing to wait, cajole, and entice.

The journey of faith to liberation is marked for us in the letter to the Colossians: “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.” (Col 3:12-17)
Let us rely on the God who heals and reconciles. Let us turn to God with a renewed heart. Amen.