

Today has been designated 'Peace Sunday' by the Church and is promoted by Pax Christi, the international Catholic organisation that works for peace in the world, based on the gospel and inspired by faith. Peace is not merely an absence of war or conflict – it is not an absence of anything, it is a presence. Just as light is a presence and not simply the absence of darkness.

The presence of peace in our society and our world depends upon the recognition and living of a vision that we may call 'the Kingdom of God' – not a place 'up there' but a way of seeing and understanding life. This kingdom, as Jesus taught us, is within. The Kingdom of God within us refutes the four great lies by which most of us have been taught to live:

First, the assumption that I am the centre of my world: I am not. I am the tiniest, subatomic fragment of an inconceivably vast creation. I am of supreme importance – each one of us is – but I am the centre of nothing. I am a part of the whole.

Second, a sense of linear time: the feeling that time passes by in a regular sequence. It does not. That is only what I *experience* from my restricted perspective. Einstein was one of the first to demonstrate that at a certain distance from the point of the observer, time has no meaning at all. St Thérèse of Lisieux said: "Time is a mirage, an illusion. Already God sees us in glory." Einstein and St Thérèse are speaking the same language here.

Third, a conviction of separateness: the belief that I am a self-contained unit of consciousness distinct and separate from all others. I am not – none of us are. The universe is indivisibly one. This is why Jesus taught: “Love others as you love yourself. Treat others as you would like them to treat you. Forgive others, that you yourself may find forgiveness. When you have done it to the least of my little ones, you have done it to me.”

Fourth, the fear of death: the certainty that the death of the physical body ends all life for the individual. It does not. Life, consciousness, a sense of self-identity – as opposed to self-centredness – continues. It goes on, recognizably so.

The truth is that God is the centre and substance of the universe; that time as we experience it is but a virtual reality because life is eternal; that we are not separate and divided from everything else that exists but are essentially one with *all* life; and that death is as big an illusion as time and separation.

The physicist Darryl Reaney wrote:

“From hydrogen, the simplest of atoms, have come symphony orchestras, diamonds, the glimmer of dew on spider-webs at dawn, the underwater flight of dolphins, the sheen of mother-of-pearl inside seashells, voyager spacecraft, fractal images on computer screens, and the laser light of cognitive awareness. This is not a mechanical progression from simplicity to complexity; it is a creative act of unimaginable stupendous proportions. We – you and me –

are the products of this evolutionary creative process. The universe is one in a way that we can hardly imagine. Our very bodies are made of exactly the same raw material as the most distant galaxies; they consist, if you like, of stardust.”

The three words which most hinder an inward understanding of the kingdom are *I*, *me* and *mine* – because they support and sustain those four fundamental lies that we have been taught to live by. Obviously we must have a proper sense of who we are, a stable self-identity, a personal story that includes all the circumstances of our upbringing; but we should also know that this is not the *entirety* of who we are – that there is far more to us than we can ever imagine. Such knowledge begins to grow in us when we move towards – however slowly and painfully – *we*, *us* and *ours*.

Every time our brother or sister looks into our eyes, he is searching only to find himself; for he knows, already, that he is a part of us; every person we meet is an aspect of ourselves, longing for recognition and love. There is a path between one heart and another – an infinite network of paths joining our hearts together – but our eyes cannot see it and our minds cannot grasp it: only the oneness of love can do that. This means that when I hurt another, I hurt myself; when I attack my brother or sister I attack myself; when I fail to love my neighbour, I fail to love myself. It is as grotesque as my hands hurting my feet, or my liver attacking my lungs, or my head failing to love the body to which it is attached.

The mystical heart of both science and religion teaches us that every being, from a blade of grass to a galaxy, is held in infinite *Being*, because all life is indissolubly one. It is the same life in all of us. And science does indeed have a mystical heart, except for the most diehard materialists: contemporary physics understands the world in a way that would have been immediately understandable to the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart. A sense of separation is the result of living *solely* by the law of I, me and mine.

Pious Jews for many thousands of years have recited the *Sh'ma Yisrael*: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." The word 'one' is quite difficult to translate because it can be understood in several different ways - but the neo-Hassidic mystic would say 'one' (*echad* in Hebrew) actually means 'oneness'. God is oneness. A contemporary Jewish writer says of this:

"There is only One. That is the great truth of mysticism, found within and reaching beyond all religions. That one embraces, surrounds, and fills all the infinitely varied forms that existence has taken and ever will take. (...) The one Being is clothed within each being. For reasons we do not begin to understand, that One dressed itself in this "coat of many colours" we call the universe, and on this planet entered into the endless dance of variety and multiplicity that we call evolution. It is present within each unique form of existence that has come to be in the universe, and yet remains "One, in and through them all."

The transformation of *I*, *me* and *mine* into *we*, *us* and *ours* opens up into the radiance of 'Thou' and beyond even this, to a timeless *oneness* between Creator and creature that transcends the utility of words. There can be no true peace without this vision. When oneness is recognised, love will be born, and when love is born, nothing other than peace will be possible.