

## Monastic Scribe LXVI: January 19, 2024

### MY AMERICAN DREAM

I want to share some of my thoughts on the status of the church and society in our country. I believe we are adrift, divided, polarized, unable or unwilling to listen to each other. I present some of my thoughts and observations. I hope I stimulate your thinking and do not expect you to necessarily agree with me. You can dismiss me as a crotchety old man or, otherwise, see I may have some wisdom of the elders. I base my observations on my life's journey so far.

My birth took place in the final stages of the great depression. My parents had bought a house when they married in 1928. With the depression my father lost his job and they could not keep up payments so the house was sold. We remained in it for a while as renters.

Seeing my father come home after looking for work was hard for me.

Once the war came, we had to put up our car "for the duration." I walked to school which was a good local, parish school. None of this was traumatic for I lived in a loving, safe home.

I see the fifties and sixties as marking great change. The fifties saw more education, transatlantic flights, and the leaving of ethnic city neighborhoods to the new suburbs ("Little boxes" as the song went). I believe this was the growth of individualism and affluence.

We had won the war and were on top of the world. The sixties, on the other hand, uncovered layers of submerged parts of our history and culture. Slavery and Jim Crow laws, white supremacy, the destruction of native Americans and their culture. The war in Vietnam and the assassination of a President shook us up. These were heady times with much promise but the lack of leadership in the country and church failed to cope with it all. Anti-war demonstrations, the civil rights movement, the "pill" and sexual revolution leading soon to women's liberation frightened many people. Richard Nixon provided a comforting backlash. Later Ronald Reagan appealed to the materialistic desires of people and thus set the stage for the unbridled capitalism, the power of corporations, and extravagant living style that most of the world sought. The rich became richer and

## Monastic Scribe LXVI: January 19, 2024

the poor poorer.

Americans have been, by nature, kind and caring but the speed and lifestyle became systemic and we all succumbed to this new culture. We thought it was limitless and open to all.

That is my very brief view of what has gone in my lifetime. What took place in the new century? Under cover of nationalism, in the churches as well, racism was solidly in place. Evangelical fundamentalism and very conservative Catholics were afraid of change. The election of Obama was an affront to many pure Americans.

Anti-semiticism reared its head. Politicians took advantage of people being afraid and threatened by change that was a threat to their way of life. The church's belief in social justice and the preferential option for the poor was scoffed at. Churches, in fact, had become as comfortable and respectful as the main culture. They had been coopted.

A world of computers, smartphones and varied gadgets enthralled all especially the young.

And now? Helped by instant media coverage, the stresses are manifest.

We have a congress that cares more for its own ideology than the needs of the people. We have bishops and cardinals who publicly disagree with the Pope. Institutions are all suspect but leaders who are theatric or entertaining capture interest. People are more concerned for the price of eggs than the impending destruction of the world environment (not seeing their connection). Gun violence in schools and public places. A lack of civility in public discourses, on airplanes and in crowds. Now, I really don't want to be negative. I think people are basically good and there are many fine things that happen every day. But individualism and consumerism are systemic and we live in a culture that preaches both every day.

Jesus preached "that all may be one." We are social beings made for social living. Relying on ourselves, our own ego's needs, we are overcome with fear, discouragement, loneliness, isolation, an increase of suicide, the neglect of the common good. I believe we are made to live in harmony with God, with all people, the creation, and ourselves. Lack of any of these undermines our

## **Monastic Scribe LXVI: January 19, 2024**

wellbeing. We think separation of church and state means elimination of God. This is too much for us to bear. Likewise, we are made to be in harmony with all human beings, whether we think they are worthy or not, deserving or undeserving. We are made to live in harmony with the earth, earth's goods and the cosmos around us. We are made to live in harmony with ourselves which means real self-awareness, self-knowledge, and self-acceptance, acknowledging that we (individuals, country and church) are sinners but also that God is all merciful. I am not advocating any one religion or church or even going to church, though a faith and prayer community can sustain us in the midst of chaos and impasse. We are not God, we are not in control. We need to know there is a power that transcends us. We need to live with hope and trust.

In a nutshell, this is a summary of how I see the world, particularly our American society. I don't claim to have all the answers. There are political, economic, social, educational things that need to be done. But, meanwhile, our faith in God, each other, creation and ourselves can sustain us. We are not alone We are part of something much bigger than ourselves and we have to live with trust and especially love. For me, Jesus and the gospels tell me how to live. I am happy to be a Christian, an earthling, a human being, and a blessed child of God. How about you? You can always find me at [joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org)

**Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL**

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.