

Daily Mediation 12/15/21

The Cosmic Mass and Malidoma Somé, continued

Good morning.

We're continuing our meditation on the work of Malidoma Somé and how it intersected with my work on reinventing ritual. Malidoma says, and I was citing this here in my book on *The Reinvention of Work*, in the chapter on Ritual. He says,

"When a civilization lacks rites of passage, its soul is sick."

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"The evidence for the sickness is threefold. First, there are no elders. Second, the young are violent. Third, the adults are bewildered."

Well, I think the first and third are pretty clear: that there is a sickness to the soul in our culture. And there are no elders: that is to say, we need rituals for elders as well as rituals for young people. Our culture, wants to *retire* elders -- that's the favorite word. Park them someplace, near the golf courses, I guess, if they have the money.

But we do have to recover the vocation of elders, especially as more and more people are living longer.

And that the adults are bewildered -- I think that's a pretty good statement about a lot of the political and media and economic and religious worlds, and certainly education, that are trying to do their their work these days.

As far as the young are violent, of course, not all young are violent, but there's plenty of violence. And there's plenty of shooting-up by young people, of schools and theaters, grade schools and all the rest.

So I think the wisdom there from Malidoma is clear. When a civilization lacks rites of passage, it's sick. The evidence for the sickness is threefold: first, there are no elders; second, the young are violent; third, the adults are bewildered.

Lots of wisdom there, and lots of invitation to change our ways.

Now, Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, working on the new Universe Story, say this about the importance and the role of ritual.

"The story of the universe has been told in many ways by the peoples of the earth. In all these various circumstances, the story of the universe has given meaning to life, and to existence itself. So our creation stories give meaning, and therefore, meaning to existence. The story has been celebrated in elaborate rituals."

And that is exactly what the Cosmic Mass was meant to bring about: a new expression of ritual and celebration about the wonder of our being here, and how we got here. Berry and Swimme go on:

"We can hope that the new creation story will soon be finding expression in poetry, music and ritual throughout the entire range of modern culture, by universal scale."

That is certainly my hope too. And that is why we called our liturgy the Cosmic Mass.

And I told the story in today's essay, and yesterday, I wrote a bit of the story behind the Mass, especially the role of Malidoma Somé, in encouraging the Mass and that kind of ritual, which he thought was so important and so foundational to a culture getting its soul back.

There is a shadow story that accompanies the story of the Cosmic Mass, and that is that this NOS group in Sheffield, England, unfortunately, was led by someone who was less than a person of integrity and he was cheating in his marriage with some female members of his community.

When this was discovered, there was a huge collapse and a horrible moment for everyone involved. Very, very disturbing, because many of these young people had found a home in the community precisely because there was a lot of abuse at home because it was at the time when there was tremendous unemployment in Sheffield and that part of England. And so the whole movement was ended in a most abrupt and disturbing way.

Of course, that that kind of trauma has happened carries on in the memory of these people all these years. And so there is a real scandal, then and it is still a tremendous trauma and pain for many to carry.

Now we in California had not yet started up a Mass, and we realized with that big shock that obviously, we had to do things very differently, much more transparently. So when we got around to creating our own version of this kind of ritual, that first person I chose to lead it was a woman, not a man or a priest. She was a graduate of my program with a degree in film, and technology therefore. And I'm happy to say she led for many years and, of course, it was a very open group, the supporters, and we didn't have any secrets.

And then after a number of years of leadership, we passed on to other people, etc., and we're happy to say after 25 years there's never been a single scandal, whether sexual or financial, around the Cosmic Mass. And it is a shame that the genius of the first generation was there, but it was tainted by some malfeasance on the part of the founder.

So just another reminder that humans have, all of us, a shadow side, and we have to pay attention to it as individuals and as communities. And if we don't, you know, the results are dire.

So, ritual itself, ceremony itself, liturgy itself, needs to be in a context that is also ethical and transparent.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.