

Reflection for the 2nd Sunday of Advent by Ewelina Frackowiak

Isaiah 40.1-5, 9-11; 2 Peter 3.8-14; Mark 1.1-8

Does the following observation describe your reality as well? Often when I direct my attention to my inner world, to my emotions and thoughts, a judgement arises inside me telling me: I should not feel that way or I should not have these thoughts. Does it sound familiar? Let us call this judgemental voice that tells us what is right within us and what isn't our inner critic.

During Advent we are invited to let go of the inner critic. John the Baptist, the messenger who prepares us for transformation, who stands at the threshold between the known and the unknown, calls us to baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. No forgiveness of sins is possible if the inner critic is in charge.

The word repentance is a translation from the Greek word "metánoia" which also could be translated as "change of mind" or "change of heart". A change of mind must occur for the forgiveness to take place. Recall a time when you experienced forgiveness of sins – either because you forgave yourself or because you forgave someone else. Didn't it feel as if a shift occurred in your mind? You had an "aha moment" in which you suddenly understood what propensity in you, what wound inside you was the source of the harm you inflicted on others, or in the case of you forgiving someone else, you recognized the suffering from which the harm done to you came from. You recognized and you felt compassion. If you had been full of judgement at that moment, your mind wouldn't have had the space to make that shift.

I do not know about you but I was raised in a household and in a society in which certain emotions and feelings were strongly unwelcomed and associated with shame. Anger was one, for example. Years of parental and societal influence trained my inner critic to seek punishment for myself whenever anger arose in me. The way our emotions work is that if you suppress one, you suppress all. As a result, you may start feeling like an empty shelf, you may feel depressed.

In my early thirties, as a fresh immigrant to Canada, I entered psychotherapy. My therapist created a safe space in which I, without the inner judgement, could feel anger towards a person who had mistreated me for years. And then not long after that outburst of anger, something unexpected to me happened. As I was weeping upon the mistreated self, I started weeping for the person who had harmed

me. All of a sudden I understood that she herself faced enormous parental expectations which she just projected onto me.

Letting go of my inner critic allowed me to feel anger. Feeling anger freed me to feel compassion and to forgive.

We talk here about forgiveness of sins, but what is a sin? Isn't something transitory, since forgiveness / understanding destroys it altogether? Some people will describe themselves as sinners and whenever I hear that label, I am worried that we forget about our Essence which is the Divine as experienced through our souls. "Between God and the soul there is no between" - said Saint Julian of Norwich¹. And yet... Knowing mentally that our Essence is divine is one thing and letting that Essence to emerge in our consciousness is another. Some spiritual teachings say that we are already enlightened. This is of little comfort to most of us because we lost touch with our Essence². Our shared experience is the feeling of loss, of missing something, which we often interpret as deficiency: "Something is missing in me and so something is wrong with me"³.

We need to bring the Essence, the Kingdom of God from our unconscious to our consciousness. "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand"⁴. That's the task that Jesus' teachings set for us. (Not exclusively Jesus' teachings, other spiritual paths do that as well of course.) The first step is the change of mind towards forgiveness of sins. John the Baptist's very message. The message of Advent. Let's make it happen.

¹ *Meditations with Julian of Norwich*. 1983. Edited by Brendan Doyle. Bear & Company. Santa Fe, p. 17

² Cf. Maitri Sandra. 2000. *The Spiritual Dimension of the Enneagram. Nine Faces of the Soul*. Jeremy P. Tarcher / Putnam. New York, p. 30.

³ *Ibid.*, p.31

⁴ Matthew 4:17.