



A journal for restless minds

A DISTANT DARKNESS

From ashes, a spirit of light

BECOME THE YOU

God created you to be

OFF ANGELS WINGS

Look into the face of God

Happy Thanksgiving!

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

A Distant Darkness

From ashes, a spirit of light

Beautiful music owns a quality so sublime it could only come from the hand of God. Plato believed that *"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything."* Great music expresses the intangible, the indescribable, the very essence of being; great music bears witness to an indomitable spirit which cannot be denied a voice.

With every note and nuanced phrase, a composer weaves a tapestry—where words and vision fail in praise—, an evocation of raw emotion, now cloaked in shadowed time and memory. There is a necessary story, a tale to purpose every score; without the story the music pales; without the music the tale recedes, then slowly slips away.

So it was when a brief work was recently performed by the Reno Philhar-

monic Orchestra. The five-minute piece, *My Name Is Mikta*, was composed by Jordan Roper, an orchestra teacher at Brigham Academy.¹

As the composer tells it, the music came to him after a relative told him the story of holocaust survivor, Mitka Kalinski.

"After hearing Mitka's story, I couldn't help but begin composing. I've never put the

kind of work and dedication into any other piece that My Name Is Mitka received. I feel that the piece effectively expresses the traditional Jewish

musical style while have the main melody convey the sadness and harrowing life of Mitka's youth while still containing hope and happiness with his survival."

The music is evocative, a haunting melody filled with darkness and light, sadness and joy, life and death, and yet ultimately, the indomitable triumph of the human spirit. And yet, without the story, the listener would never fully hear its voice.



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Become The You

God created you to be

Deacon Chuck is out of town to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday with family and friends. He will return on November 28th. The homily this week is reprinted from a homily delivered on September 13, 2011.

The Jewish-American author and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Elie Wiesel wrote in his book *Souls on Ice* that "When we meet our Creator at the end of our life, we won't be asked, 'How well did you use the talents I gave you to love and serve my people on earth?' Rather, we'll be asked: 'How well did you use your talents to become you—the you I created you to be?'"

God created each of us with an abundance of talents and the freedom to use them as we see fit; and He also gave us the grace and wisdom to use them wisely. Jesus tells us that we must use our talents even though using them will require us to take risks, because in order to live as God desires we must take risks. God takes a tremendous risk whenever he breathes life into our souls, infuses us with gifts and talents, and grants us the freedom to use our gifts wisely; shouldn't we risk everything for Him?

In today's gospel, the word talent is commonly interpreted to be money, but while that is essentially correct, there is another definition that can be applied here as well. In earlier times a talent was a unit of weight not a measure of value. It did not matter what you were weighing—it could be pre-

cious metals like gold or silver or it could be flour or salt—a talent of anything weighed the same.

We are all gifted by God with talents and it makes absolutely no difference what kind of talents they might be. What is important is that we use our talents to the best of our ability and not bury them or misuse them.

The servants who used the gifts given them wisely were rewarded with more gifts and their master's joy, not because they produced more than was given but because they had taken a risk with the gifts entrusted to them. The servant who had only one talent was afraid to lose it so he buried it. He took no risk, refused to use the gift he had been given, and squandered the opportunity that had been entrusted to him. For his failure to use his gifts, his gifts were taken from him and given to those who understood what was required of them.



For those who use their talents wisely, those who take risks, they will be entrusted with more! But those who neglect or squander what God has given them will lose all that they have. Last week Jesus told us to stay awake, this week he tells us to use the talents we have been given.

The more we live, the more we risk, the more God will give us in return. Anyone who accepts and uses the gifts God has given them will receive more. This is not a one-time only offer. Each gift used wisely for the glory of God, will result in more gifts received, over and over again.

All that we have, all that we are, all that we can be is a gift of love from God; we must use it or lose it; it is our choice and our obligation.

In her book *A Return to Love*, Marianne Williamson wrote "We were born to make and manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

I will leave you with this thought: God loves you, and there is absolutely nothing you can do about it, so are you using your talents to become the you God created you to be?

Amen.

Homily for the
Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31
1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
Matthew 25:14-30

Off Angels Wings

Look into the face of God

For many, Thanksgiving is a pivotal moment in the steady march toward a new year, marking the onset of what is commonly called the "holiday season". Bookended by the national holiday and the ringing in of the New Year, the season is filled with a madcap rush of non-stop activities centered on family gatherings, shopping, decorating, cooking, parties, and more. The air is filled with insistent voices urging everyone to stop whatever they are doing and shop, shop, shop. Each passing day only serves to increase the sense of impending doom should one fail to get it while it lasts!

Lost in all the hype and blather is the true reason for the season and recognition that there are those who will find it impossible to participate in this festive time. With all of the activities that ensue in preparation for the Thanksgiving holiday, our thoughts are seldom focused on the why? Each year it seems, fewer and fewer can either recall or care to consider the basis upon which we come together to celebrate any of the holidays that occur over the final days of the year. The prevalent attitude appears to be that there need be no reason for bacchanalian celebration.

Forgotten are those who find themselves in circumstances much like a poor Jewish carpenter and his very pregnant wife who found themselves in unfamiliar surroundings, friendless, alone, and homeless. Those who did not share their circumstances gave no thought to their plight as they went about their ordinary and busy lives. They traveled through the masses as if

they were wrapped in invisibility cloaks. It was the darkest of times.

But there came a night, a time of new birth, when light off angels' wings dispelled the darkness and the heavens sang with joyful noise. It was a time when those who lived among the shadows received unexpected visitors whose presence lifted their spirits and brought them the gift of hope. And the visitors received the greatest gift of all for they looked upon the newborn child and saw the face of God.

As we begin to journey through the year's waning days let us take a moment to remind ourselves of the richness of the season, the significance of the events we should be observing, and to remember those less fortunate. Let us always and everywhere thank God for all the blessings we have received from him. And let us open ourselves to be the lamp that brings light to those in darkness and fire to warm the hearts of those who lay shivering in the cold.

Ipenned the poem that follows as I looked upon the partially snow-covered ground that lay outside my window one recent Thanksgiving afternoon. It was then that I realized just how blessed I was to be in a warm, safe place, filled with the satisfaction and contentment that comes from sharing a bountiful feast with family and friends. And while I sat enjoying the moment an uneasy disquietude began to slowly seep into my consciousness, disrupting my otherwise pleasant musings.

There is nothing wrong with having enough or even plenty, just so long as we recognize that there are those

who have little or nothing at all, and do something, anything, to share our abundance with those in need. Jesus always looked with love and charity toward those who found themselves in need, recognizing that poverty will never be completely eradicated from the human condition. It is incumbent upon all who have much to help those who have little. Give thanks to God by giving what you can to others. Thanks be to God.

*Remnants of a recent snow,
ragged blankets still lay covering,
(earth now dreaming pleasant memories)
breathe cold and whispered vapors
that waft upon the silent, bracing breeze,
and speak of life beyond the dead of winter.*

*The fire that burns within, repels
the uninvited grip of winter's death;
and darkness demands unwelcome audience
with the Light which by its nature does deny
entrance to the shadows that are want to fill
the soul with dread and raw despair.*

*Spirits dance among the embers,
echoes of once twinkling laughter,
reflections of lives joined together,
loomed with thread so tightly woven,
measured bonds from lamps undimmed,
bent in gratitude for gifts bestowed.*

*Ghosts of what well might have been,
resurrected tales of deeds profound,
sins long denied and unremembered
add substance with such fond affection
to the gilded idol, admired and savored,
consumed in sacrifice to the grateful bowed.*

*The bell that tolls with every hour
marks the unrelenting beat that tramples
through long forgot, forsaken tenements,
where denizens reside in hopeless squalor
pummeled by the frigid force of winter's breath
that blows through open sores of lost regret.*

*The flickering light off angels' wings
purchase what flames in darkness prove:
dark a barren handmaid, light its master.
Rare do angels tread upon dark & ebon shores,
yet know the smallest light shone fully
upon a stranger will illumine no other than*

The Face of God.

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The holocaust is of course for most a distant memory, a blotted stain on musty pages few have read; fewer still alive who lived through it and survived. So few, so very few. And yet, we owe a debt to remember, lest we forget that distant darkness when mankind was betrayed by men; when hell's minions danced upon the ashes of dead.

Mitka's story begins in 1939 when he was left at a Jewish *Kinderheim* (childrens' home) in Bila Tserkva, Ukraine. In 1941, at the age of five, Mitka ran away only to be picked up by German soldiers. For 18 months he survived. Once, covered by bodies of just-executed Jews, he waited for silence to crawl out alive. He was soon recaptured, put on a cattle car and taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau, then Buchenwald, Dachau, and finally the medical experimentation camp at Pfaffenwald.

"Every single Holocaust survivor story is special and harrowing in its own way, but what makes Mitka's story particularly miraculous is that he is the only known survivor from the medical experimentation camp in Pfaffenwald, Germany. What adds horror to the miracle of his survival, however, is that he escaped the medical experimentations only to be captured by Gustav Dorr, one of Hitler's men tasked with carrying out many of the extermination orders."

Gustav Dorr subsequently took Mitka to Rotenburg an der Fulda where he would spend the next seven years as Dorr's personal slave at his home and farm.

Although the war ended in May 1945, Mitka, completely unaware of the world in chaos, was not freed from slavery until 1949. Taken to Bad Aibling, a school for displaced children where they were essentially taught how to be a proper human beings, as they has spent much of their lives as slave laborers, accustomed only to the inhumanity and unspeakable atrocities of the Nazis. It was there, at the age of twelve, that Mitka first learned how to use a toothbrush, wear shoes, eat with utensils, and interact with others.

In 1951, he was sent to America. He did not speak English, could neither read nor write, and had never attended school. He learned English by watching movies.

Eventually he met and married Adrienne and together they raised four children. Today, Mitka and Adrienne live happily, surrounded by their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

During a phone conversation, shortly after Mitka first heard Jordan Roper's musical tribute, Mitka expressed dismay at how well the composer, without knowing or meeting him, could have created music which described his youth so perfectly. Roper told the pre-concert audience that Mitka had exclaimed, "That was my life!"

Rare are the moments when we are witness to the indomitable, unbreakable spirit of man. Too often, it seems, we are presented with the horrific aftermath of man's inhumanity and indifferent disregard for his own species: the death, pain and suffering that are the inevita-

ble results from the darkness of terror and evil that now pervade.

German jurist, political philosopher, economist, statesman, and historian Samuel von Pufendorf wrote in 1673 that "More inhumanity (to man) has been done by man himself than any other of nature's causes." And a little more than a century later, in 1784, Robert Burns, in a poem *Man was made to mourn: A Dirge*, observed of man's inhumanity to man:

*Many and sharp the num'rous ills
Intwoven with our frame!
More pointed still we make ourselves
Regret, remorse, and shame!
And man, whose heav'n-erected face
The smiles of love adorn, –
Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn!*

In 1895, American author Ellen Gould White would pen, "The inhumanity of man toward man is our greatest sin" and American psychoanalyst Edmund Bergler would subsequently, in 1949, express the thought that "Man's inhumanity to man is equaled only by man's inhumanity to himself."

Why is it then that man holds such a dismissive and derisive view of himself? Perhaps the answer rests in a question never asked. As Frank Sheed explained in *Society and Sanity*:

"All men, we say, are equal. But equal to what? There is not a single quality in which all men are equal, or in which any two men are equal. Is the phrase meaningless? It has meaning only on one condition, a condition which most of those who use it do not fulfil. All men are equal only in the sense that all men are equally men, just as all triangles are triangles, or all elephants, elephants. So that men are equal to one another in all that is involved in

being a man. But we do not know what is involved in being a man, till we know what a man is.

Indeed something even more obviously practical than human equality is at stake, namely, human rights. The phrase 'rights of man' too often means what is good, or humane, or socially useful to concede him. But concessions, however liberal, are not rights. Rights are what man is entitled to, not what society is willing to let him have. They belong to man because he is man, and are valid even against society. Unless they are this, they are not rights at all, but only a more or less hopeful expectation of society's kindness. But has man rights? Obviously the answer depends on what man is....

Every question under discussion, every revolutionary idea and conservative reaction—all boil down to the question, 'How should man be treated?' and we can only answer this in the light of our view of what man is."²

Sheed subsequently notes that "There is an absolute deadliness about questions that never get asked because everybody knows the answer—for when they do get asked, no one has an answer ready."

Using the then ongoing contest of will between American leaders and Soviet rulers to illustrate this, Sheed writes:

"We are quite incapable of having any reasoned discussion with them on the subject. For that would mean showing them that our way of treating men is right and their way wrong, which can only be done if we show that our view of man is right and theirs wrong. And that we cannot do, be-

cause we do not know what our own view of man is. All we can do, in this unhappy circumstance, is to tell the Russians that we personally dislike, and indeed find revolting, their treatment of human beings. They reply that they like it and do not find it revolting....Every phrase we use shows that we have not realized our fundamental inadequacy. I remember being urged to vote for a particular political party because it would get along will with the Russians—'We speak their language.' The truth is we do not speak any language. We just feel strongly and splutter. Our lack of clarity about the elementary word, man, means that none of our subsequent words have any clear meaning.

The Russian rulers, be it noted, are not in this dilemma. They do know what they mean by man. They happen to be wrong, having got their view of man from Marx, who had not looked at man; but they are quite clear about it and they can justify their treatment of man by it." This discussion ends with this statement and question: "The first of the rights of man is to be treated as what he is. What is he?" The question remains unasked and unanswered by most today.

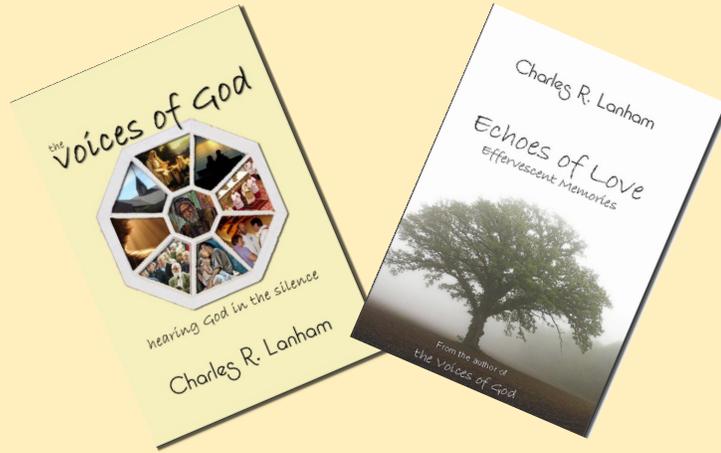
Yet, it remains as crucial a question, and as deadly, today as then. Until we are willing to seriously consider the question of "What is man?" we can and will never address man's inhumanity toward man. As long as we ignore the question, we cannot hope to countermand the view that man is akin to all other living things and therefore subject to the biblical command: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth (Genesis 1:28).

The holocaust was a direct consequence of our failure to ask the question "What is man?" The extermination of millions of men, women, and children, the medical experimentation, absolute disregard for human life, and enslavement of man can only be examined under the dark lens of man as nothing but a tool to be used for the benefit of those with the power and inclination to do so.

Mitka Kalinski's story stands as a living testament to the indomitable human spirit when confronted by man's inhumanity toward man. Mitka was present at the concert, seated a few seats away, and rightfully received a warm standing ovation when recognized by the composer, Jordan Roper.

To know of history is often a test skewed and skewered by those who compile it; those who lived and died and made history are seldom consulted on its historical accuracy or interpretation. To look into the eyes, to see the smile, to witness the incredible presence of a man who survived one of man's cruelest, darkest moments, to rise from the ashes, to become a man, a husband, a father, grandfather, and great grandfather, was a very special gift. To hear the music, know the story, and stand in appreciation for the courage and fortitude of a five-year-old child who refused to submit to the evil of men, well, that was a gift of a lifetime.

1. Jordan Roper, *My Name Is Mitka*, <http://jordansroperfilmcomposer.com/album/my-name-is-mitka/>.
2. Frank Sheed, *Society and Sanity*, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1953), published: Ignatius Press, 2013, 9-10.



Books are available on **Amazon.com** or from the author's web site at:

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