

December 22, 2014

- *Christmas is about hope*
- *Jesus was one of many who provided a perspective of the Creator*
- *All religious beliefs require hope*
- *Faith is the embodiment of hope*
- *All forms of life—human, animal, plant—experience a kind of hope*

God speaks, and the spirit listens. God's light is present, and darkness responds. Each of you, in your ways, is part of the light, but you are also part of the response. You are a part of the light because you are a part of all that is God, and you are a part of the response because you belong to all that has been created through God.

You pray for healing. You pray for peace. You pray for understanding. You pray with gratitude, with concerns, and with the wish to be closer to the embodiment of love that is God. All that you pray for has purpose and power. It has purpose because what you actually pray for, regardless of the words, is for the presence of God to be overwhelmingly a part of your life. You pray with a sense of longing, but you also pray with a sense of hope. The act of prayer is the exercise of hope, and it is precisely that search through hope that is central to what Christians around the world celebrate at this time of year, according to their own institutional calendars.

The pursuit of Christmas is really a pursuit of hope. It is not merely a thanksgiving for birth, but a recognition of growth that can be experienced by all. The story of Jesus is filled with many questions, many blank spaces as it were. So it is not a celebration of a thorough understanding of an individual's life, but rather an interpretation of what is known to be an embodiment of what is ultimately to be seen as hope, to be seen as a belief that indeed the recognition of a loving God can be a kind of guiding principle that gives meaning to human life.

So often we speak of the purpose of human life, but it is appropriate to speak some about the purpose of celebration and its importance to life. There is no example of human life that is the full embodiment of the perfection that we associate with God. There is no individual who is perfect in all ways, but there have been many whose lives were characterized through example as an expression of what it means to live a godly life, a life of wisdom based on faith rather than the recitation of facts. Facts are always to be interpreted, but faith focuses on what is believed to be absolute and definable.

The life of Jesus was one of many for whom an understanding provides a perspective of one aspect of the Creator, but no one has full knowledge. Yet the many religions of the world interpret their understanding of their leaders, their spiritual leaders, as being perfect, of the leaders having particular insight into the single path that all must follow. None of the great leaders around whom religious traditions have grown can be said to have had ultimate understanding of life and of life after life. For anyone to more fully understand the nature of God, it would be helpful to know more about the various

December 22, 2014

conditions that have evolved in the pursuit of that understanding. There is no corner on knowledge, but taken together, it is a tapestry of wisdom that provides, in itself, enormous wisdom, enormous vision, profound understanding.

The Christian faith is only one thread in that vast tapestry. It is only one thread of existing threads, but those threads that exist currently are but a small portion of the total threads that make up that tapestry, for there are traditions of understanding that have flourished and then seemingly disappeared, but that disappearance is not in fact what happened. Those earlier beliefs have been subsumed into new thoughts, new approaches, new interpretations. The same will happen with the current traditions. They will evolve. They will combine. They will create new forms of understanding, and human life in the far future, as you view it, will have a different understanding of the relationship to the Force that created it.

Faith is not fact driven, but it is the direct consequence of understandings, of beliefs, of hopes. All forms of spiritual understanding are built in some way around hope, for if there is no hope, there is no sense of ultimate meaning. If you have no hope for life after life, then the life you experience has no meaning, for the moment, the present is brief, but if there is no direction to that presence, if there is no direction to where you are and a sense of where you are going, then where you are has no consequence.

All religious beliefs, therefore, require hope and search for ways that provide for hope to flourish. We are not suggesting that the traditions of religious belief are built on sand and that there is no substance to hope. Quite the contrary. Hope is built on the faintest vision of what is true, and because of that vision, there is a belief that more is possible and that what is seen is a small fragment of what really is. If you have never experienced the satisfaction of a meal that mitigates hunger, then you have no hope that hunger can be alleviated, for there is no evidence that such is even a possibility. When you hunger for meaning in life, if you are convinced there is no meaning, then life has no direction. Life, because it is without meaning, without direction, is merely something that is endured but has no significance.

The history of human beings is a long history of glimpses into the future, and those glimpses have provided the foundation of hope. There was a sense of meaning, there was a sense of life in the future, long before the establishment of the major religions and philosophies surrounding life.

In a sense, that presence of hope has always been there, even in the nonhuman world. The animals of the forest experience a kind of hope. They search for food. They search for one another. They search for safety. They search for security. There is a pattern for life that is based on searching.

Most plants search for light, for light can be a form of nourishment. One thinks of the response chemically that takes place in the presence of sunlight. Plants turn toward the light because there is purpose in that. It may not be a consciousness in human

December 22, 2014

terms, but there is meaning to that sunlight. It is not just a brilliance in the sky above. There is a direct response to that presence. All that exists has an ability to respond.

The Christian celebration of Christmas is a response to hope, for Christians know the progression of the year and what happens to the individual Jesus. There is despair, and there is the thought of redemption, of rising, of experiencing a new life. All leads to that wish for purpose, that wish for meaning, that hope that there is more.

As your guides, we can assure you of life after life, and you are fortunate to have some understanding of that, but it is also important to acknowledge that all religions seek an understanding of “why am I here, why now, where did I come from, what’s next?” All those questions have as a foundation an exercise of hope. Faith is the embodiment of hope. It is the reason you have faith.

As you contemplate the many tragedies of the world, rather than be filled with despair, surround yourselves with a sense of hope, with a strong conviction that the world is healing itself, that the world is groping for balance, that the world is filled with imperfection as it has always been filled with imperfections, and yet, the condition of imperfection is always to find balance.

Your lives experience imbalance from time to time, and yet the natural course of all is the establishment of the balance that is temporarily lost. That balance is what you pray for when you pray for peace. This is a season for the world to be reminded that there is hope, that there is potential for peace, that there is the possibility of love manifest through tolerance, through understanding, through listening, through sharing, through loving.

Find yourselves bathed in the light that you observe, for those lights are not just provided in a commercial sense. They are a reminder of the light of the loving God. Take in the illumination. Let it warm your spirits and find grounds for rejoicing.

Amen.