

LIFE AND WELLBEING CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Subverting Il-King



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Today's readings: Genesis 22:9-13; Psalms 51:3-6, 12-13, 17; Romans 5:12-19; Matt 4:1-11.

In *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine* (1991), Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette employ Jungian psychology on the shadow, the animus/anima, the persona and the self to explore the four male archetypes of king, warrior, priest/magician, and lover to help men and women deepen their appreciation of the mature masculine psyche.

Each male archetype has two bipolar dysfunctional shadows splitting the self. A mature and well integrated man reconciles and harmonises the shadows, aiming at attaining the healthy expression of the archetype, progressing from boy psychology to man psychology. The mature king archetype is the crown of all others, integrating harmoniously the lover, the warrior and the priest/magician. The king is centred, lives with integrity, protective, brings order, empowers others creatively and is a blessing to them, leaving behind a legacy. The immature king is either a tyrant or a weakling. Ultimately these

archetypes, which have their feminine counterparts, help us to consciously own the process of maturity towards our true self.

This interesting book will be better appreciated if taken in the "masculine mystique" context of the 1990s, which saw the emergence of critical studies regarding the notion of a "crisis of masculinity", a theory that developed in the 1960s, leading to the emergence of various men's movements, as well as the appreciation of alternative masculinities in opposition to conventional masculinity. As recent as 2022, debate has been ongoing on the notion of toxic masculinity in relation to gender norms, hegemonic masculinity and health issues in men.

Locally, the series of recent tragedies are alarming pointers to a rise in toxic masculinity harming men, women, the young and society on all levels, starting from subcultural usage of adulatory terms like Il-King, to political immaturity, domestic violence, substance abuse, a sense of grandiosity, hate speech, femicide, and a widespread variety of harmful actions and speech.

Today's gospel for the first Sunday of Lent presents to us Jesus in the desert. Having received baptism and proclaimed as "the beloved son", he is led by the Spirit to be tempted and to face the devil. We all know the details of the temptation narrative of the battle between the devil and Jesus.

Here, the four male archetypes are present. Jesus enters the desert as the lover who battles with the devil as non-violent warrior, remaining rooted in God as a

priest/magician who shuns magic and refuses to act in some warlock fashion. Finally he emerges from the inner battle in the desert as King: "the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him".

The narrative points to the perils of manipulation, self-centredness, and the eagerness to dominate others by presenting to us Jesus being led to test through a sort of initiation ritual, emerging as a fully mature individuated man, in Jungian terms, as a true king; the one through whom, as the Letter to the Romans tells us, "acquittal and life came to all". The same letter points out that through "the transgression of the one, death came to reign", as indeed, our wrong selfish individual actions and choices have a negative collective impact that prove to be harmful to society and the world at large.

We are reminded today that the temptation "to be like gods", to take the easy way out in our pursuit of success, and to take personal advantage over others, is ever present, only to end up like our progenitors "sewing fig leaves together to make loincloths for ourselves", attempting in vain to cover our nakedness.

Perhaps it will do us all good to give up our superficial and childish "giving up sweets" Lenten approach, to really listen instead to that inner divine child pointing out that the king we pretend to be is naked, prompting in us the desire for radical change for the good of all.

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Parishes, movements and community



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should examine why this is happening. One important reason is the communitarian dimension of the faith which is tangible in the spiritual movements and often lacking in parishes.

In the past, villages were small. Everybody knew everybody else, and village life was communitarian. For them, attending church service was automatically a communitarian experience.

Then villages started to grow with people coming from outside. Most of these neither mix nor are interested in village life. This is giving rise to anonymity and to individualism. For those who frequent their new parish for church services, the communitarian dimension is lost. They simply go for the service.

Those who desire to live their Christian life more intensely feel the need to live it in a community. Faith is not just a church service; it is a relationship with Christ as Saviour. Nor is it just a relationship between me and God; it is a relationship between us and God. The parish offers a service; most



The communitarian dimension of the faith, which is tangible in spiritual movements, and often lacking in parishes. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

of the time it does not offer a communitarian experience. If the parishes want to attract these people they need to make parish life communitarian, a place where lay persons can share their faith with other believers, become an apostolic community and be participants rather than mere receivers.

Priests serving in parishes need to strive for this to happen. Lay persons have to be treated as fully fledged members of the Church. They need to find enough room where they feel listened to, where their suggestions are taken seriously. They have to feel they are working with the priest, not for him. This already happens in some parishes and it is proving very fruitful. Pope Francis is taking the Church in

this direction. He is giving a strong message and example of this through the Synod on Synodality for which he has involved all the Christians of the world.

It doesn't mean that all that is proposed will be accepted; but it is going to be listened to and examined carefully with the conviction that the Holy Spirit inspires everyone, not just the hierarchy.

Members of spiritual movements should also involve themselves in the life of their parishes. They should become apostolic and use their enhanced faith experience to help other Christians go beyond attending services. If they isolate themselves from the rest of the community they won't be really growing. The effort has to come from both ends.

QUOTES & NEWS

Pope on evangelisation

During the general audience on February 15, Pope Francis continued his catechesis on evangelisation: "Before sending the disciples on mission, Christ, the Gospel says, 'calls them to himself'. The proclamation is born from the encounter with the Lord; every Christian activity, especially the mission, begins from there. Not from what is learnt in an academy. No, it begins from the encounter with the Lord. ... So only the person who remains with him can bring the Gospel of Jesus. Someone who does not remain with him cannot bear the Gospel. He will bring ideas, but not the Gospel."

Renew ethics of common good

Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, the Vatican's Permanent Observer to the UN, addressed a UN session on work held between February 6 and 15:

"Renewed ethics of the common good and respect for the inherent and transcendent dignity of every human person are necessary to reshape labour markets in a way that promotes both economic growth and integral human development. The recognition that the human person is the measure of the dignity of work should form the basis for policymaking capable of both tackling the structural inequalities of today's global economy and restoring the authentic meaning of work."

On synodality

In a homily during the European assembly of the Synod on Synodality, Synod secretary-general Cardinal Mario Grech prayed that "our endeavour does not become an exercise in exclusive distinction, between those who are in and those who are out". He also spoke against a tendency to "blur the distinction between what is within the Catholic tradition and what is outside". While saying that "the Synod is not there to destroy distinctions, to destroy the Catholic identity", he objected to "an opposite and equally problematic way of reading the Synod as a way to 'eliminate all distinctions'".

(Compiled by Fr Joe Borg)