



At A Distance – Wednesday- June 3, 2020

“The Learning of the Lodgepoles”



Greetings Saints. It has been yet another challenging week. Within the framework of the COVID 19 Pandemic, we are being tested yet again by what we see unfolding before us in the streets of our region, state and country. The yearning for justice and equal and fair treatment continues unabated. We are all searching for grounding, for anchors to hold us, secure us during this time of trial; during this “time in the desert.”

In my personal spiritual journey, I have always relied on three spiritual anchors. These have been, and will continue to be:

1. The simple message of “Primitive” Christianity: “Love one another as I have loved you.”
2. The Quaker Testimony of George Fox: “that of God in everyone.” That we are made “good” in the “image and likeness of God” so that each of us carries a “spark of the Divine” within us.
3. Indigenous, First Nations Wisdom: “we are all related;” Canku Ota – there are many paths to the Creator; and “Follow the Original Instructions.”

“Original Instructions”, in some form, are common to almost all spiritual pathways that seek a stronger and more intimate connection to Creator God. Original Instructions is a First Nations word, that teaches how to live in a more sacred community with God, nature and “all our relatives.” Rather than saying what we shouldn’t do, “Thou shalt not...,” the Original Instructions simply speak about how we should live in order to be in “right relationship” with ourselves, our families, our communities and our Creator. The Original Instructions challenge us to:

1. Live Peacefully
2. Live Respectfully
3. Live Truthfully
4. Live Wisely
5. Live Honorably
6. Live Courageously
7. Live Humbly

One of the most beautiful traditional teaching stories about “The Original Instructions” is from the Cree People whose ancestral tribal lands are in Southern Saskatchewan and Alberta in Canada and in northern Montana. This teaching is “The Learning of the Lodgepoles.”

The Plains Indigenous Nations were migratory. They followed the food which were primarily the buffalo herds. The Coastal and Woodland Nations of the East and West Coasts were blessed with more stationary, reliable and steady food sources that precluded them from the need to travel over long distances. As a result, the villages could use more permanent building techniques such as the Longhouse, Plankhouse and Wigwam. Plains Nations used the Lodge or what has been commonly called the Tipi.

Plains Nations’ Lodges are designed for easy set-up; take-down and transportability. The main structural component are lodgepoles (long, straight young trees) and a covering usually made from buffalo hides. The Lodges were erected ceremonially with symbolism and story. The Learning of the Lodgepoles is timeless and particularly relevant for the world in which we find ourselves this week. Let’s have a look...

The center structure of the Lodge consists of three lodgepoles tied tightly together. Tied as tightly as possible, so tight that they act as one. The first Learning from the Lodgepoles is that any individual pole cannot stand by themselves, that we always “need to lean on another” for support and stability. In the Cree tradition, the three “tripod” lodgepoles signify obedience, respect and humility. These three qualities are critical, integral, basic and symbiotic to any individual, family or community. Without all three tied together, all the other poles will fall individually. As individuals, families and communities we succeed better, faster and more sustainably when we act humbly and in deep respect for one another. But what about “obedience?” In our dominant, Western society, obedience is not a character tool that is desired, supported or encouraged. We idolize the rugged Individualist, the outlaw, the loner ... “nobody tells me what to do, I am free to make my own decisions!”

The “obedience” that the Indigenous Elders are referring to is our obedience to the Creator’s “Original Instructions.” Obedience to living a life of courage, dignity and honor. Obedience to a life “respecting the dignity of every human being.” Obedience to a life of seeing “that of God in everyone.” Obedience to living a life of congruity with the Sacred Promises, the Vows that we have taken; whether at Baptism, Marriage or Ordination. These are our Original Instructions that we have committed ourselves to for a lifetime.

Today is a good day to remember...to remember what holds our Lodges together strongly. Remember the Learning from the Lodgepoles. When we hold together tightly with obedience to our Vows and our Original Instructions; when we hold together tightly with Respect; and when we hold together tightly with Humility...nothing can topple us. Nothing can tip us over or make us fall. Self, Family and Community all held together as one by the Learning of the Lodgepoles. Aho!