

Our Deepest Wanting

Soon after Thomas Merton's conversion to Roman Catholicism he had a conversation with his friend Ed Lax. Lax and Merton were walking down Fifth Avenue one day when Lax asked: "What do you want to be anyway?"

Merton hesitated, and said, "I guess I want to be a good Catholic."

"What you should say," Lax declared, "is that you want to be a saint."

"How do you expect me to be a saint?" Merton asked.

"By wanting to," Lax answered.

As we enter the winter dark and our country is divided and COVID-19 keeps killing our citizens, it's time for us to ask ourselves, "What do we as a nation want to be?" and "What am I called to do in response?"

When I was a child, I became calculating with my Christmas list. Because my dad ran a sweater company, there was a 100% chance I'd get a sweater. So that was always on the list, but somewhere down the list I'd go ahead and write what I really desired: a giraffe; a swimming pool; an airplane.

Too often we as a nation have settled for sweaters. As a consequence, the disease that infects us is despair and the antidote is hope. Remember what the prophet promised? "The wolf shall live with the lamb. The leopard shall lie down with the kid, The calf and the lion and the fatling together, And a little child shall lead them (Isaiah 11:6).

We yearn for that unity, that peace, that shalom. Regardless of which politicians you think are right or wrong, no one thinks we are at a good place in this country. But what is to be done? The task before us is not head work but heart work. Too often we as a country are wise as serpents but ignore virtue of being innocent as doves. Hope, however, requires a dose of innocence.

It's time to embrace our deepest wanting. When we embrace a vision of unity, we let go of our cynicism. The prophet promised that "A little child shall lead them." That little child is the inner voice that calls our

nation and ourselves to be more: more civil, more kind, more generous, more united, more just, more understanding, more focused on the well-being of all God's children -- more of who we are created to be.

Newness never comes from cynicism. Its origin is hope. Therefore, as faithful people, can we dare to reclaim our civility, our generosity, our commitment to the common good? Can we want to be part of the light that invites others to leave their frozen opinions and walk into the new? Can we want to have faith that God is doing a new thing here and now in 2020 and as a result open our hearts and ask God not only to make us new, but make us agents of newness for this broken land? A little child will lead them. The little child is in you.