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An authentic politic of hope ... with an afterword by Saint Nobody

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Hope. Hope seems to have broken out in the U.S. electorate; hope of a kind many have not seen since the end of World War II with its estimated death and maiming toll of more than 70 million people, equal to more than half the 1945 population of the United States.

The hope message of presidential candidates has become a call and response song between contenders and voters, complete with drums and chanting. This ?mass hope? appears to have created a collective energy that can move a moraine overland, pushing everything in its path ahead of it, accumulating, growing, carrying an almost evangelical vigor similar to the Great Awakenings of the last many centuries.

Sometimes bestseller lists are better harbingers of cultural attentiveness than venerable pollsters. Thus, whether about elections, presidents, candidates or others who strive to lead, note the flag of hope on these mastheads: ... *Audacity of Hope* (Sen, Barack Obama), ... *Build Hope* (President Jimmy Carter), ... *Message of Hope*, (Mattie J.T. Stepanek), *Images of Hope*... (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI).

Yet, we are also seeing the first signs of commercialization of hope in this election. The word hope is now used so often in political speeches, by pundits and commentators that one wonders if the concept of genuine hope risks being made into a rote endeavor, leaving a lustre that is more Hollywood than holy.

As people move in a collective hope movement that must rub against the emery of pop culture, might somehow the true nature of hope be forgotten? Might there be a reductionism in which hope is turned into a ?want my candidate to win foremost,? a Santy Claus wishlist of pork barrel make-up-fors? Those would be lesser understandings of hope?s raison d'etre.

Hope is not something we suddenly get off a promising person. Instead, hope is a grace given; an infusion from Spirit to spirit. There are catalysts sometimes. Sometimes not. But a catalyst ought not be confused as the source of hope.

Thus, hope: far less an acquisitive endeavor but rather an inquiring one. Hope: far less a ?satisfy-me? noun, but rather, an action and traction verb. Hope: not rooted in institution or a person, but in *inspirare*, a breathing *with* Spirit ... a way of learning the soul?s intelligent thoughts and instructions as amplified through hope

Pandora

In ancient mythos, there is a well-known story found in Hesiod?s tale of ?Pandora?s Box.? In our time, this story is often told something like this: Presumably, all of humanity lived in a perfect world until a seeming spoiled child is given care of said box, and told to keep it unopened. The child?s curiosity however, is provocative, prompting her to give in. She opens the box.

Suddenly, out flies old man Sickness all bony and spare. Out jumps Madness all tangled in its bedclothes. Out comes Pestilence. Famine all scabby and weeping comes next. Out comes rictored Death. The world is made difficult, hideous. For the first time, ?in misery men grow old quickly? and die. Thus the world wanders from shock of it all, lives in fear of both life -- and death -- thereafter.

That is the broken shard of story many of us remember. But there is more to the story of Pandora that gives us an x-ray about what incubates hope, what destroys hope, an ironically apt x-ray of our own times too.

In better translation, it is a jar that Pandora has been given, not a box. It is not that within the jar is mayhem, and outside the jar is paradise. No. It is that different elements within the jar are alchemically contained, are in a sense balanced against one another. Thereby, no one dominates the others.

Ancient Theognis also wrote on Pandora. He notes what is often left out of modern versions: Before the vessel was ever given to Pandora, several elements had already escaped from the jar. Not negative elements. Rather, positive and cherished ones. Because those particular vital elements vacated the human world -- not because Pandora opened the vessel -- that is why humankind has fallen into mayhem.

> ?Pistis (Trust) ... has gone. Sophrosyne (Restraint) has gone from men ... [Thus] men?s judicial oaths are no longer to be trusted ? The race of pious men has perished; men no longer recognize rules of conduct or acts of piety.?

We see in the story that it is goodness personified that has escaped the jar, gone to Olympus to be away from men.

Pandora, realizing this terrible loss, falls into grief for what has gone, grief for what maladaptive forces, as a result, now have free rein in world. There are no more checks and balances.

There is yet another trope: Just under the lip of the vessel, Pandora finds one last element, a spirit called Elpis. Elpis translated means hope. Elpis is a winged creature, who is a seed bearer. She is often portrayed carrying fruit-bearing flowers. Thus Pandora sets loose Hope, who is last to be released into world.

Hope grows larger as she rises from the creation vessel; she becomes the boon, not the bane, of humans who are hurting. Elpis, Hope, is more than just spirit. She is also called nurse. By allying with the grieving world, she is healer. The nature of hope is not some fatuous thing, nor only a wish fulfillment. Hope was incubated and born from grief, from everything gone wrong.

Hope?s work in the world is not to restore perfection, but to heal, to bring new understanding of what can and cannot be changed, and thereby add back into human experience restraint, honor and trust, to bring as close a healing harmony as possible.

There are ways to kill hope. Cynicism and bitterness can kill hope. Under their influence, hope dies first for oneself, then equally a misdeed, hope is killed for others as well. Ironically, infusion of hope as grace given -- if the embattled person will allow it -- is what begins to heal bitterness and cynicism.

We can surmise that upsurges of hope in the U.S. electorate occur not because people are merely relieved to have new options, but because they have been grieving so very hard for so very long. We need only to look at the history of war upon war, whether international, or familial or religious or corporate, to see evidence of profound and prolonged grieving for loss of Pistis (Trust) and Sophrosyne (Restraint).

What each soul will do to use this current new hope by grace granted, remains to be seen. Certainly, the spirit

that we thought was dead in us, is found to be very much alive.

Why do you look for living among dead?

To bring full circle the idea of hope as radiant essence of the Source without source, and to offer you, dear reader, the special blessing of Saint Nobody, just these last two little stories then.

I am not a theologian, nor part of an august midrashim. I wish I could be, but I?m afraid were I to write or interpret illuminated manuscript for long, the road grit and motor oil from my life travels would somehow leach right up through the paper.

That?s why some of my happiest days as a kid were with my nuns, brothers, and priests of the Order of The Holy Cross -- particularly in theology classes in high school. During one semester, a brilliant young nun gave us permission to translate the standard ?dost, thee thou? Bible into ?hep cat? English.

I loved the rhythms of Elizabethan English, middle English also, yet I liked the guttural glossolalia of my teenage times too: words like ?cool? and ?dig?; the softer ones like ?man? and ?so fine.? My translations of Bible passages maybe got at least a grade of C from my teacher back then, I hope. Nonetheless, my extended exegesis pretty much went like this:

> Angel of the Lord at the tomb: ?Hey you, Yeah you I am speaking to. Yeah, I?m an angel. Well, angels sometimes wear black motorcycle leathers too. See, we got to fit in on earth in order to get our messages across, ya know what I mean? So, what you doin? here in the bone room, cryin?? Lookin for who? Oh dat master they put up with the other two guys up the hill? Yeah, well, He aint here. Yeah, well like I said, He aint here. Whatchu asking among the dead for who died but is still alive? What?s amatter witchu? Everything ain?t always what it seems, you know? Geez, what?re they teaching you kids up to the school these days anyways? Everybody past three years old knows that you can die and still rise up among the living again. No, I can?t explain it to you unless yous was an angel from the brand of seraphim I?m from. It?s a mystery, that?s all I can say. Get outa here now. What has died is still alive. Don?t ask me again. Go do something useful.?

I don?t know what or whom spoke into my writing arm that day. But the last ?grumpy-angel-east-Chicago? lines stay with me as being progenitor and magneto of hope as grace: Do not grieve too long. Accept grace. Use hope well: Go do something useful.

It seems instructions in all holy books are to ?go forth? now that one is infused; that hope is not a passive ride, but a meaningful to-do list. That?s what I bless for us: That we can all, in our own ways, hold hope as grace, and ?go do something useful.?

Saint Nobody

Yet, one of the laments I hear most when I am on the road teaching, is: What can I do? I am only the tiniest dumpling in a very big soup. I can?t think of anything I can do that will help, change wind, remake the world, make a statement, overturn, raise up... anything. I am only a speck, a nano dot.

That?s my signal to tell about Szent Senki. In Magyar, this means Saint Nobody. Saint Nobody does not have worldly knowing, no influential friends in high places, but has ?other worldly? knowing, and friends in low places, for Saint Nobody is most often a gardener, an orcharder, a farmer, a planter, one who knows the radicals and seeds of things.

Saint Nobody has no wealth, but in spiritual capacity is a billionaire. Saint Nobody has no access to halls of the powerful, but has access to most powerful inner spirit imaginable. Saint Nobody has no influence over world affairs, but knows how to pray hard enough to peel paint off walls.

Most of all, Saint Nobody knows the power of the small. In Saint Nobody?s far-reaching vision, every action, no matter how small, is considered most valuable. Why? Because an orcharder knows that fruiting trees that have the smallest seeds, and that the trees that shed the smallest seeds, bring the most new life into the world.

Till we meet again:

So may it be for you.

So may it be for me.

So may it be for all of us.

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