



Stewardship of God's grace

What is an "outsider"?

(Responses from congregation: Not like the group, often thinks, looks and acts differently than others, doesn't "fit" in.)

What does it feel like to be an "outsider?"

(To feel as if news gets to you last, to feel that you're not included, to feel rejection sometimes subtle, often not)

How do "insiders" feel about "outsiders"?

(That the "outsiders" are going to change things, that they will ruin what is good, that the "outsiders" are not to be trusted until they prove that they are "with us" or are "like us.")

Fear is the emotion that underscores insiders' attitudes about outsiders. Fear motives us to build walls, buy guns, build jails and engage in pre-emptive strikes.

Does it seem then, that we need to find a way to lessen the tension between "outsiders" and "insiders"?

One way to do it is to become an insider ourselves. So, how does an “outsider” go from being an “outsider” to an “insider?”

(To show allegiance to “us”. To be just like us, to fit into our way of being).

The problem with this notion of “becoming an insider” is the very idea that the world dichotomized into “insider” and “outsider” divisions. Check this out, once an “outsider” passes the test of the “insiders” becomes an “insider” him or herself, then, there will inevitably be a new group of outsiders. The system of “inside”-“outside” guarantees only one thing: there will always be “outsiders”.

Each year, new generation of scapegoats, of people to reject, a people to fear, will come up. We cannot therefore simply assimilate into the “inside.” We cannot embrace Herod – the quintessential “insider,” but rather, we must reject the notion that the “insiders” have any power.

Imagine Jesus, the Outsider, trying to “suck up” to Herod. Imagine him trying to fit in and be accepted by Herod. If only...To understand Christ as the Outsider, let us look briefly at Scriptural images that we’ve been working with this Christmas cycle of readings.



First of all, let’s look at the star. Stars are present all the time, it’s just that we don’t see them unless the environment is right. In order to see stars, we need to stand outside in the night. The first reading refers to a people who wait in darkness and are covered by clouds of darkness. They don’t see the sun, but

rather, they see a tiny brilliant ray of *hope* that penetrates the darkness. This ray of hope guides them. The star first appeared first to whom? The shepherds.

As I said earlier during Advent, shepherds lived in the outside, they had to watch the flock especially at night due to potential poaching or coyote or wolf attacks. The star appeared to these shepherds who lived in the hillsides outside of town.



Let's look at the three Magi. They too were outsiders, they came from other countries. When they went to Herod, they went to the quintessential insider, but soon discovered that the true king of the Jews was not at the center of all things, but rather, at the margins of the community. So off they went to Bethlehem.

[Bethlehem, a small rural town](#), was clearly not in the center of power.

Thirdly, consider Joseph and Mary. They came from outside of town, they arrived at Bethlehem as outsiders, and once there remained outsiders as they couldn't even secure a place to stay. As a result of Joseph and Mary's status as "outsiders," the child was born outside in a stable and laid in a feeding trough, a manger!

The child grew and was raised in another outside location: [Nazareth](#). Nazareth was not an “insider” town. It was a town that was regarded as a backwards, unclean area.



And lastly, Jesus’ ministry does not reflect an “inside job.” Jesus spent his time with people who lived in the margins of society – those who not only emotionally, but physically lived along the highways and byways on the outskirts of town.

You see, the entire Gospel was written from the perspective of the Outsider. I submit that the most profound way to understand the Scriptures is to read them from the perspective of those who are in fact on the outside. This includes those who are even on the outside – the margins, if you will – of the Church. Read the Gospel from the perspective of those who are in fact surrounded by the darkness of violence, phobias and hatred. Read the Gospel from the lens of those who suffer and hear the good news.

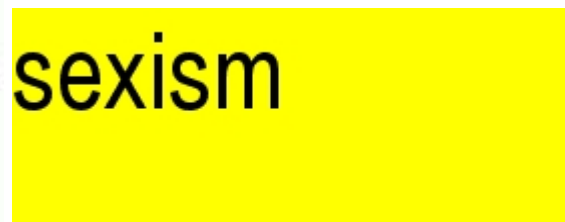
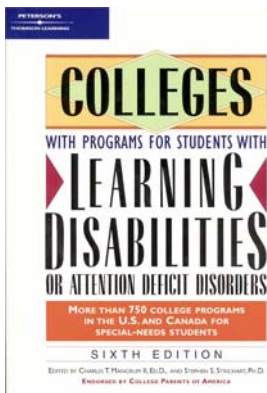
In reading the Scriptures from the perspective of the outsider, it will become much clearer to you to see that the only time Jesus went to the “inside,” was when he went up to Jerusalem to confront Herod, the chief priests and temple police and of course, Pontius Pilate. Jesus’ crucifixion took place outside the city walls and Jesus was buried in a new tomb, which was separated out from the others. Ultimately, Jesus was raised by the only One who is an Insider: God.

You see, the only true insider is God. The insider has power and God alone has power. God is the one who lifts up and tears down. Not Herod. Herod’s power is mere illusion...held in place by violence and manipulation.

God gives grace freely and we who have received grace upon grace, are called to be stewards of grace through the Holy Spirit.

The references the concept of "stewardship of God's grace" comes from today's [Ephesians reading](#).

And as stewards it is not our call to set conditions that permit or deny access to salvation, nor does grace demand that others become like us before they receive salvation.



Nor does the stewardship of grace give us the right to be "insiders." We must therefore reject the "Herods" of each generation who seek to foment phobias and hatreds among the people. "Herods" of all time will pass themselves off as legitimate, but will inevitably show their hand by playing upon insecurities and prejudices, in other words, manipulating us to keep us at war with each other using the age old tactics of wedge politics. So caught up in the struggle of "insider"- "outsider", we would never question Herod's claim to power.



Epiphany graces us with the gift of embracing Christ, the Christ who is the Outsider.

Epiphany emboldens us to confront the lies of Herod, and leads us through the dark night of uncertainty to embrace the Holy Child. Let us today embrace the Child Jesus and all those who seek light and enlightenment.

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