

# THE PULSE OF SPIRIT



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## JOY AND THANKSGIVING

7 DECEMBER 2009

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*(Previn Hudetz offered preservice music on piano. Joyce Karchere led the congregation in singing hymns from Songs of Praise and Thanksgiving, accompanied by Michael Gaeta on the organ.)*

As it is Thanksgiving weekend, I have been thinking about giving thanks. As I sat with this word last evening, thinking about what I might share today, what came to me was that if I am to truly, fully and honestly give thanks at the deepest level, I have to be at peace with that which is coming into my world, that which is appearing, as well as that which is disappearing, passing away, coming to an end. It is often easy to give thanks for the wonderful things that are happening. I was at a family Thanksgiving dinner on Thursday. My mother has been in the hospital, so it was very easy to give thanks for the fact that she was there at the table. It was somewhat universal among those there—as we all went around the table and expressed what it is that we were thankful for, that was a key piece for all of us.

If I am giving thanks for what is appearing *and* what is passing away, I could focus on that which is passing away—that which may have been useful for a time but needs to be let go of. I could also focus on the new things that are appearing. I believe that I carry significant responsibility relative to stewarding the new things that need to appear in my world, and in our world together.

It is hard for me to consider this without also considering the fact that I need to be about something more than my individual life. I have to be serving something larger. By saying “serving something larger,” I am suggesting there is something at play beyond the normal level of human existence that created the universe we live in and are part of. There is a larger design. I think there are still those for whom that is a hard sell—they prefer to believe in evolution, the universe viewed as a random process, or that only the fittest survive. The ultimate conclusion to that game is just survival. Are we just interested in survival? I know I have a greater interest than that.

Thinking about living a life devoted to winning the game of survival, I have thought of sporting events as an analogy. There are oftentimes last-minute, come-from-behind victories. I am thinking about it from the standpoint of the team that ultimately lost. They may have been playing the game, thinking they were winning. However, the game was not over yet and they ended up losing. So what about all of those celebratory dances in the end zone that preceded the conclusion of the game—a person thinking that they were winning, when in fact they were involved in a process of losing? I do not want to devote my life to a process where I appear to be winning, when in fact I am losing.

I do not know what my future holds, but I do believe I have something to do on earth that involves letting go of the world of effects and the prior failures—my prior failures, our collective failures, the collective failures of humankind—and being willing to play a part in letting something new appear. If I let go of what is passing away, it does not mean that I am letting go of everything. I am choosing, deliberately choosing, to be involved in another process: a process of letting newness, something of almighty Being, begin to appear on earth through me, through us.

We have spoken about this in previous times as relating to atmosphere, awareness and attitude, of a space in consciousness where something different can put in an appearance. In the act of giving thanks, the act of expressing joy and thankfulness, what do I feel joyful about? I feel immensely joyful about the opportunity to live a life that is, to whatever degree, conscious of this responsibility. What I am *really* joyful about is the experience I have of friendship and relatedness to those who share in that conscious awareness of service, of purpose, and reason for being.

I sometimes ask the question, not verbally but internally: What or who is being served in this situation? What is the ultimate conclusion of this encounter? Is it just to help someone to survive? Is it to help someone imagine that they are winning, when in fact they are losing? Or, is there interest in serving something larger?

I have heard that on occasion people have difficulty connecting with, or understanding, me. They may think I am a tough, stern or hard-to-get-to-know character. I do not have any excuses in that regard. But I would say that to the degree that you and I are about this one great vision, a vision of serving something larger than ourselves individually, I do not believe I am all that hard to get to know. It is not that difficult to figure me out, to see where I find my joy.

We have the opportunity to do what we do in gladness, in joyful singing, a deep sense of gratitude and thanksgiving, because life really is good. What is true and real lasts forever. The things that are

passing away, we can easily let pass away because that is not where our attention is, that is not where we find our joy, that is not where we find our fulfillment. We have the opportunity to find our fulfillment, our sense of purpose and mission together, in a shared space of dedication to letting something new appear in the world. There is opportunity to know great joy in that. I am standing here speaking words, maybe not giving outwardly a full sense of my joyfulness, of my happiness, of singing praise. I am working on it!

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