Ramadan Reflection 2021

Week 2. On the stone altar in the church of my parents’ parish in Florida, on the side facing the congregation, is inscribed: “Do this in memory of me,” quoting Jesus’ words at the Last Supper (Luke 22.19). It’s a simple yet powerful reminder of the life and ministry of Jesus (considered a prophet in Islam), and of our baptismal call to be disciples of Christ, or al-Masih (“Messiah”), as he is called in the Qur’an. We remember Jesus’ life and ministry in sharing a meal, in eating and drinking together as a faith community.

For Muslims, Ramadan is a time when they too are called to remember – to remember the Word of God (as revealed in the Qur’an) by fasting, abstaining from all food and drink during the daylight hours. They are called to remember what it means to be Muslim – literally, “those who submit” to the will of God. Ramadan and indeed all Muslim practice is about remembrance (dhikr).

For those who fast, hunger and thirst are reminders of our utter fragility as creatures, made from the stuff of the earth. The very first verses of the Qur’an revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a reminder of this: “Proclaim in the name your Lord, who created, who created humanity from a clot…” (96.1-2). The first thing God reminded humanity of in the Qur’an was our utter dependence on Him as the Creator (al-Khāliq). When I join my brother and sister Muslims in the fast of Ramadan, my empty stomach and dry tongue remind me of just how vulnerable I am, and how dependent I am on food and drink, the bounty of the earth which God has provided. I am reminded of how precious and fragile my life, all lives and all life really are.

I also remember how surah (chapter) 96 of the Qur’an continues: “Proclaim! And your Lord is most Generous, who taught humanity by means of the pen, who taught humanity what they know not.” Here we are reminded of our God-given capacity to learn, that we are not merely flesh and bone, but we are mind as well. As fasting reminds me of my human frailty, so studying, reading and writing remind me of human dignity. The Qur’an reminds us that learning is an integral part of what it means to be human, God’s creation. I remember the Creation story as related in the Qur’an, how God “taught Adam the names of all things” (al-Baqarah 2.31) and commanded the Angels to bow down to this noble creature whom He had fashioned from the dust of the earth. Utter humility and utter nobility. Even after humanity “slipped,” as the Qur’an describes the Fall, God turns to this noble, fragile creature and teaches us again “for He is the One who continuously turns (to us), and is the Most Merciful” (2.36-37).

“Do this in memory of me.” Eat, drink, fast, live, learn and remember. Do all things in memory of the God who creates us, teaches us and turns to us. May we be mindful creatures and attentive students.

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