



Spiritual Care Notes: December 2018

Fifty years ago this month, NASA's Apollo 8 became the first manned spacecraft to achieve lunar orbit. While circling the moon on Christmas Eve, her crew provided the world with stunning photographs, the most iconic of which is of the blue and white orb of the Earth as it rises above the stark, gray lunar surface, both set against the backdrop of the dark, black void of space, something no human eyes had ever before witnessed live and in person.

During a live television broadcast that night, the Apollo 8 astronauts read the first ten verses of the Creation Narrative from the Book of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth....And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters he called Seas: and God saw that it was good." Apollo 8 Commander Frank Borman concluded the broadcast with, "And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas, and God bless all of you - all of you on the good Earth." Decades later, Borman explained that NASA's only instructions to the crew for the Christmas Eve broadcast were to "do something appropriate." Apollo 8 pilot Jim Lovell added, "The first ten verses of Genesis is the foundation of many of the world's religions, not just the Christian religion...there are more people in other religions than the Christian religion around the world, and so this would be appropriate to that and so that's how it came to pass."

Not long ago, I experienced an unexpected opportunity to perform interfaith ministry at Maristhill. After visiting a resident and their spouse a few times, I offered to pray with them in English part of the Jewish Shema prayer. The Shema is one of the oldest and most important prayers in the Jewish faith. The portion of The Shema that we prayed, "Sh'ma, Yisrael, the Lord is God, the Lord is One..." is also found in Deuteronomy 6:4. When we finished, they seemed to be genuinely appreciative of my effort to reach out to them spiritually. To be honest, I received from them more I gave. But in ministry, that is often the case.

The photos taken by Apollo 8's crew and the words of the divinely-inspired authors of Genesis and Deuteronomy remind us that despite diversities of religion, culture, race, national origin or sex, truly we are more alike than we are different. In 2018, as in 1968, we are still One...all of us on the good Earth.

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