

Theology in a Tea Cup

Imagine a tea cup, a saucer, a tea pot, all placed on a towel. Imagine the tea cup is upside down.

What happens when you pour the tea?

St. Augustine said that conversion is turning away from the thing that will kill you, and towards the thing that will give you eternal life.

Turn the tea cup right side up.

Before pouring, consider the tea cup. First of all, it represents kenosis, the process of being emptied out. How can the tea cup function, and receive the tea, unless it is empty?

Thus, we too must be emptied out, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, God's infinite grace.

Note also that the tea cup must not be cracked, but whole in order to receive the tea. The health of the receptacle matters. Likewise, we too must have healthy boundaries, we too must be spiritually well in order to retain the Life giving Spirit poured into us.

Note also that the tea cup does not receive the tea for its own sake, but for the sake of others. The tea cup's ministry is to quench the thirst of others. So too, we must share of the grace and Spirit that fills us, not for our own sake, but for the sake of ministry to others.

Just as tea must be drunk soon after pouring, the fruits of the Holy Spirit are not to be hoarded, but to be shared, as soon as received, before the joy and fervor is allowed to cool.

Next, imagine that you are serving a small circle of friends their tea. Before pouring, you place a little sticker on the side of the tea cup facing you. You ask the person across from you to describe the sticker. They cannot because the tea cup is solid, and they cannot see through it. What to do?

The solution is to ask for the perspective of someone whose position is diametrically opposed to your own. Your friend could ask you to describe the sticker. To paraphrase St. Francis, it is better to hear than to be heard, to understand than to be understood. Respect is related to the word spectacles. To respect someone is to really see them, as the icon through whom you can see the face of Christ. The shadows melt away, and discernment begins, when we bring into our perspective those whose views are the opposite of ours.

Back to the tea cup. Ask each friend in the circle to describe the portion of the pattern that they can see. Sounds like the tea cup will be fully described?

Now ask, instructing everyone to maintain their position, for a description of the bottom of the tea cup.

To comprehend is to fully and completely grasp something. The "prehend" is like prehensile, as in a prehensile tail, that can grasp. A circle of friends, surrounding a tea cup, cannot fully comprehend it. How much more difficult it is to comprehend God.

Humility comes from the word "humus", the living part of the earth. To be humble, means to be in touch with your roots, to be a son or daughter of the earth. Once we attain humility in our pursuit of the divine, our perspective will be transformed, and even if we cannot see it, others when they look at us will see someone whose image is conformed to that of Christ.