

Encounter

I have a note from the day February began that I saw a whale role over the top of the water just below the deck (3) used for walking laps. It's a beautiful image I don't want to let go of, and is a metaphor for a part of what is most memorable and beautiful about this trip. Perhaps it is an example of "exotica". Wildlife. Natural beauty and wonders. Things that in my youth I thought of as **permanent** and which now appear to be signs of the ever-changing characteristic of all creation.

I could see markings on its back. It was majestic. Sparkling with the divine.

To look out the window and see floating ice the size of a basketball court! A mile out an island covered with snow, the snow floating into the shoreline water like the lava on Hawaii island, while boulders and crags jut out of the white.

We saw whales blowing, whales swallowing krill lazily through the calm Antarctic waters. We saw penguins like little etchings on the icebergs. We saw them swimming in the water, almost like a group of children playing, but these had little fins that protruded above the surface of the water.

I briefly saw a sea lion on a small iceberg when I went out on the bow.

I recorded gentoo penguins up close so that I could recognize them in the water we moved into the scheduled position but the wind was 70 mph and the waves too severe such that we had to scrap that plan

We Made our way across the straight to **Shetland Islands** where we saw beautiful glaciers

Mary Pat went out on the bow. We saw flowing water in waterfalls. I overheard someone saying that when they were in the same place in 2016? or so the temperature was 65 ° degrees (the time it set a record by a whopper)

Being served

At dinner with our new friends I experienced an insight about which I am somewhat embarrassed to admit. I made a comment about the different class of staff based on their uniform. The maintenance kind of people wear white informs. The others usually wear white or blue. Mark called them something like **house slaves** vs. **field slaves**. He didn't use that exact language, but I immediately understood and was excited to find out that he has faced the same kind of dissonance I have felt from the beginning of the cruise. I asked him what he thought about it.

He said he tried to show gratitude to all. I said that I had decided it was my calling here to receive the services with **Grace**. But it's a challenge to both of us. And I think there are very few here who perceive the dynamic.

I hear the language of slavery and think it is a contemporary experience. Just by a different name. The Jeff Bezos of our era opposes unions with a fury. It almost makes him beyond the pale for me. The separation of wealthy and *hoi polloi* is a major feature of our world. It's going to blow up. The **center cannot hold**.

Grace in politics

One of the tensions I feel on a daily basis I broadly categorize as **politics**. It is so prominent probably because the main connection with the world beyond the ship is through the edition of the **New York Times** provided by HAL. There are also copies of the British edition of **The Guardian**, a Canadian paper, and the **LA Times**. Only very late in the cruise did I discover that when we are at sea, away from cellular, the ship's internet allows for a Google search. Generally one gets the page from Google with an overview of results. Clicking on any of the links fails, but it allows access to a good bit of trivia.

My emotions tend to be rattled by the developments around the world. Ukraine. The rise of the fascist governor of Florida -- someone commented that we should refer to him by his transgender name: "Rhonda Santis." What shall we expect from the coming "Chinese century"? And late in the cruise I have that thought that for my own well-being I need to return my work on the **Church in a time of Tyranny**, begun in 2016.

In February I wrote:

There is no salvation in **politics**. For some this might take the form of the classic **apolitical** preaching I am so disgusted by. Another approach is that of the Dalai Lama and Abp. Tutu in their *A Book of Joy*. They are profoundly aware of the politics that have formed and so truly distorted their lives. The Dalai Lama lives as if **compassion** is at the core of his human life.

All human interaction is bound up in **politics** (Aristotelian understanding). For some this takes the form of being "political animals". (I was never very good at doing that, at the family level, the parish level, the diocesan level.) For some **politics** is understood as Machiavellian.

Perhaps it is Desmond Tutu who illustrates a political animal I should like to emulate. Profoundly radical, leaning in the direction of justice and liberation, a little like Blessed Oscar Romero, the church's face on the coin that bears the politician's face (Nelson Mandela). I am grateful for my early teachers about politics: J. Glenn Gray re. Aristotle, Tim Fuller political theory across western civilization, my church history professor. They convinced me , that **politics** as such is just another word for the discourse of society that binds us together. "Whenever two or three are gathered together, there you have politics."

Sometimes on this journey I have wondered how I can find the courage, stamina, strength, foolishness, to go back home to the foul reality of the political reality of "home".

More than once I have thought of our journey around the Antarctic peninsula as one of the highlights of our journey. An important part of that experience was the series of lectures by the "team". They were united in their appraisal of the seriousness and nearness of the apocalyptic nature of climate change. They made the case that Antarctica is a key driver of global climate. One of my insights was to recognize how close Antarctica is to Australia and New Zealand. In a similar way they pointed out how the continent of Antarctica is the only place on the globe where ocean currents flow entirely around the globe, circling the continent.

I wondered from the talks whether the computer scenarios take into account what the collapse of human society would do to the various ecosystems. I observed that something so simple as the Covid virus and its associated responses led to a measurable reduction in the buildup of CO2 in the atmosphere. The destruction of the Ukraine economy has caused a measurable drop in the

availability of food for the world's starving. It seems to me the last few years have demonstrated the fragility of the many systems that run our human society. How easily it all can come crashing down. The meditation of Ash Wednesday and Lent about our own mortality is a healthy one to have on a regular basis. For me it came this year in the Southern Hemisphere.

All human activity is bound up with politics. The key to all is **compassion**. In just the last few days (2023-03-11) I have read an oped about the need to develop the sensitivity / awareness of our interdependence. We All Depend on Someone. Let's Celebrate That. In the light of this I can strive to see the stratification on the cruise ship as a reflection of connection to one another rather than our separation. David Macaulay designed and produced a number of books that illustrated the inner workings of things: Cathedral, City, and the like. Mary Pat and I both have said that we'd really like to see the inner workings of a cruise ship. This would include all the spaces that are so familiar to the staff, from their living space to their work spaces.

My family

During this trip my younger brother was married in Albuquerque, NM. It occurred in January and we knew all along that our plans conflicted with attendance there. Mary Pat and I facilitated my daughter Lydia being able to be in attendance. She didn't really even thank us, but she has been going through a difficult time and my sense is that she is seriously depressed. We received a family photo. It was poignant for me. Except for Shirley's daughter, the entire gathering was my family. I was the common denominator. Yet I wasn't there.

That brother was in the navy in the 80's. He missed a family reunion of the Swanson's. But I was touched when in correspondence during this trip, he seemed to resonate with several of the milestones of our journey: the Panama Canal, crossing the equator, rounding Cape Horn. It was as if we were able to connect in ways that have been broken, going back probably to our father's funeral in 1985. I hope we can build on that.

I have lost sleep over the brokenness of my family ties, especially Emma and Lydia. I have lost sleep over the bitterness I feel toward the bishop of Hawai'i. There is a strange numbness (emptiness?) in the feelings I have for Bridget. Clearly, it would seem, I am still working at resolving the conflicts of my life's narrative. Still, I have a sense of a growing peace. Hinted at in a short exchange with Mo where I shared with her my anguish over the violence that is at the heart of so much that we call human. She was familiar with the notion of **redemptive violence**, perhaps most identified with Walter Wink. He and those I respect and admire regard the fetish of redemptive violence as one of the dead-ends in the path of human beings. There is a different sort of path reflected in the many humans who have found a different way, characterized by humility and compassion, service and cooperation. In just the past days I have thought that perhaps I should (could) start a project along the lines of Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain*. I have perhaps made a start of it with the journals of our Grand Tour with Holland America.