NOVEMBER REFLECTION



Love and Hate

The picture is of large trees in our front yard. The connection of this picture with the subject of this reflection, “Love and Hate”, is that there was a time in my life when I loved being in a desert. I have visited several deserts, and once spent 5 months in a caravan in a desert out of Alice Springs. When I was there, my whole being seemed to expand. I could see long distances, appreciate sunsets and feel the presence of God all around me. Much later, when I moved to living among the tall trees seen above, at first I felt cramped and confined. However, over time, the presence of God that I had found in the vast space of a desert, I began to find among the trees. I stopped rejecting them, paused, touched them respectfully and saw them as God’s love being present and watching over me.

Last year on December 14, there was an attack on Jews at Bondi Beach which claimed 15 lives and injured more. On October 19, 2026, we in Australia had a Member of Parliament in Victoria, Helen Haines, violently and publicly attacked outside her office by a man driving a car at her. It resulted in the loss of both her legs. Other MP’s have since reported that they often receive offensive online messages. Such actions of violence and hate are not restricted to Australia but are also found elsewhere in our world. At present there are wars in Ukraine and Russia, the Middle East, and other places. In these conflicts people have been, and are being, killed and injured, and their homes destroyed.

If we now look at our own lives, ‘hate’ may be too strong a word to readily describe our feelings towards others who have hurt us, even deeply, with angry words, emails or actions. Although we may not have responded with more angry words, emails or actions, we may need to look at how we have regarded those who sent them. Also, we need to think about how we ourselves have treated people whom we did not like, or did not like what they said or did.

All this negativity can lead us as Christians, to ask where is God’s love and presence to be found in relationships where hate, anger and suffering seem to dominate? Can we respect all others as fellow children of God, and be ready to forgive, or be forgiven, so that love may begin to transform such relationships, and eventually bring good out of what was bad? We do not have to agree with the views of everyone we meet to prevent violence and hate, but we can respect others with different views from our own, and listen to them. In this way, love may be shown to, and received from, others.

God’s love is active but not destructive. It flows through the members of the Holy Trinity, and also flows around, in and through us and all God’s creation. This love, I believe, is able to change or weaken feelings and expressions of dislike and rejection. Also, I suggest, such love can lead us to share in the sufferings of others, and gradually transform them into love and care. We can see this in the loving acts of Jesus. In the gospels we do not read of Jesus condemning those who punched and spat at him, or shouted cruel things about him when he was captured and nailed to the cross. Instead, we are told that he asked God to forgive them, (Luke 23.34).

Jesus, in his life on earth, not only shared our pain and death, but also showed us the joy of resurrection and eternal life in God’s love. Today, I believe, God shares in the sufferings of all people. This means that God not only shares and is present in the suffering of Helen Haines, but also in that of a woman experiencing domestic violence, a child being bullied, and people whose family members have been injured or killed, and their homes destroyed in wars.

Helen Haines' family, friends and many others have been, and still are, sharing something of her suffering and have sent her flowers and good wishes, and also prayed for her. Amazingly, her husband said that Helen's first words after coming out of a coma, expressed concern for her staff, and gratitude to the bystanders who helped her during her attack, and to the doctors who cared for her.

If we are "in God", as I claimed in my last leaflet, and God is in and around us in some way, then surely we must be able to share in the sufferings of others, and also God's love for them. For all of us, there is the possibility of revealing God's love and presence in our relationships with others, rather than anger, contempt or hate. It is not always easy to change our feelings, words and actions but it can be done with God's help. We then can allow God's love, compassion and healing to flow through us to others.

I found that not only in a desert but also among tall trees can be places where I could rejoice in finding God's presence. I believe we can all find and experience God's loving presence and life everywhere, even in places of hate, rejection, confinement, suffering and death.

Sister Helen CSC
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