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Asian New Year Reflection

Maho Morishita

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

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ASIAN NEW YEAR REFLECTION

Maho Morishita

Nota bene - What follows is the transcript of a reflection given by Maho on the occasion of a Convivium fellowship, here at Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary on February 4, 2016.

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."¹

A Happy New Year in advance to you all! During next week people in most East Asian countries will celebrate the Lunar New Year. New Year's Day is the biggest holiday for people in Asia. We enjoy that day with the longest break, the biggest family gathering, and the most special feast. Today after this prayer, we will have a wonderful feast with Asian food. A wonderful feast is one of the most memorable kinds of experience in our lives.

In my country, Japan, there is a Buddhist parable which describes heaven as a feast table. In heaven, there is a feast table with splendid meals, and there are, also, very, very long chopsticks. The parable tells that the chopsticks are about three

feet in length. Those chopsticks are not practical. You cannot make them reach your mouth at all. So, what happens?

The trick is that in heaven, people use the chopsticks to feed someone in front of them. People feed each other. Each person can eat only with someone else's help. Surprisingly, this parable tells that in hell, there is the very same table with the very same, long chopsticks. In contrast to heaven, in hell, people try to eat by themselves with long chopsticks, so they are hungry forever because the chopsticks never reach their mouths.

This Buddhist parable tells that there is no difference between heaven and hell in terms of environment. The difference is people. If you help each other, you can make the table heaven. If you only try to make yourself satisfied, it means you are already in hell now.

In today's reading, Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is "among" us. Jesus also says that the Kingdom of God is created by our minds and actions as in this parable. Moreover, the Kingdom of God for Christians does not mean life after death. This is the difference between the Buddhist parable and Jesus's words. For Christians, The Kingdom of God is among us, right now, if we help each other. The Kingdom of God is here, if we feed someone else before we eat. The Kingdom of God is here, if we listen to others more than we speak.

Now, the feast is ready in the dining room! We have Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese cuisines. Remember that the Kingdom of God is among us at the table. A Happy New Year. Enjoy the feast!

Notes:

¹ Luke 17:20-21 (NRSV).