Darwin makes a port call

By Chaplain Norbert J. Karava

Along with cats, dogs, most mammals, especially primates, human beings manifest certain interior dispositions commonly known as "attitude" not only in their words and tones of voice, but in their body language which expresses these internal dispositions more directly than the most eloquent of verbal discourses; especially when it is spontaneous, the body language "reeks" of the attitude.

Ah, and here come the faces: smoldering, surly, snooty, sneering, sultry, contempt-laden, dismissive, eyes aggressively gaping, combative, together with the behavior of rudeness, human springs wound to the point of breaking, walking bombs, one step removed from detonation, and then, often enough, down right, impossible-to-misread malevolence. And, not to be unfair to our beloved base, where understandably there are so many soda straws sucking the same all too limited milkshake, on any given day you will find this lovely ambiance of life in downtown New York, Chicago (especially) or Los Angeles.

Certainly there are various readings of this. Is this really what we are, what we are revealed to be when we are significantly pushed beyond our comfort zones? This is the Darwinian reading, the Skinnerian calculus of responses to stimuli. From this point of view, persons are really nothing more than mere psychological bundles that are irrevocably selfish, at least in the sense of being inexorably focused on the gratification of their own desires and needs. This reading is quite compelling and is reinforced to a very great extent by the factuality of human behavior. Ask any veteran cop, or border patrol agent who has seen the parade of "respectable" humanity compromised nearly every time it has been really put to the test.

Yet there is one equally compelling reason for the mind not to succumb to this Darwinian interpretation, and this begins the story of the second reading: experience mightily suggests that we are simply not happy as self-centered beings. In fact, the more our schemes of self-gratification succeed, either because of our luck or our cleverness or our talent, the more miserable, spiteful and self-destructive we become. We are left with an ever increasing desire for an ever diminishing gratification until the gratification of the desires for even the most exotic and choicest of pleasures becomes tasteless and tedious.

The thrill of living is over but life goes on and we are hardly able to survive our own success without flirting with black and morbid, if not suicidal thoughts. In this reading, a person is not a mere psychological bundle of needs and desires, but… and here it is: a "who" and not a "what." As soon as we grasp this, we immediately see that all the "whats" in the universe do not equal a single "who." A "who" can never be reduced to a complex of "whats," be they desires, passions, emotions, appetites, thoughts or any other process-phenomenon.

A "who" is not a thing but more an event that is switched on by something we can only express as "kindness," both as received and, or experienced and as given. Yes, kindness is that revolutionary disposition of will or turn of spirit that initiates "love," which most often is confused with desire, want or need. When this happens, we become alive in such a way that by comparison, our previous life as a thing-mammal in the cage of competition and adversity with other thing-mammals seems hardly a life and more a degrading rendering of ourselves as wolf men howling at the full moon.

From this point of view there is some good news: if we have the courage to look in the mirror and behold a smoldering, surly, snooty, sneering, sultry, dismissive, combative visage reflected, we are not regarding the countenance of a "who" but the caricature of a frustrated "what" that, unlike other primates, can and is supposed to be a "who." Ah, but that requires real courage, otherwise known as "kindness."

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The Sullivans School hosts Katoh Kindergarten exchange

By Steve Parker, The Sullivans Elementary School Public Affairs

The halls of The Sullivans Elementary School rang with more than the usual joyous laughter of children Oct. 28. On that day, the annual Katoh Kindergarten Exchange took place where, six kindergarten classes from Sullivans hosted more than 50 Japanese kindergarten students and teachers from the Katoh Elementary School in Shizuoka Prefecture.

Shizuoka Prefecture, where the Katoh Kindergarten is located, is 2.5 hours away from Yokosuka base. This year, at the request of the Katoh group, Sullivans hosted the day as close to a major American holiday as possible so that the visiting teachers could observe how American teachers incorporate the holiday into the curriculum. A holiday like Halloween, which is popular in both cultures was a great fit.

Many different experiences were on tap for both groups. Katoh does not have a cafeteria so the visiting students had the unique American experience of eating in the Sullivans cafeteria. The Japanese students also had recess with the American students who shared with them many of our traditional games and toys. One crowd pleaser in years past was the tricycles which the Japanese schools do not have. Many of the American children were speaking and communicating for the first time with someone who does not speak their language. Past experience showed both sets of teachers that "Let's play!" is a language spoken by all children. Even more experiences will await the American children when they visit the Katoh Elementary in February for the next leg of the exchange.

The Katoh students participated in a storybook character parade where they paraded their favorite character from popular literature. After the parade, some classes attended specials with their host classes while some chose to remain in their classrooms to play and bond together. Some teachers planned seasonal craft activities like making pumpkin pie in a cup, making play dough and other crafts related to the season.

At the end of the day, the Japanese students presented hospitality gifts to their American hosts as part of a traditional gift exchange which will be recipirocated when the Americans visit their newfound "buddies" in February. The American students sent their newfound friends on their way with a little something for remembrance. Then, a shared snack and a short walk to the buses marked the end of a remarkably unique cultural exchange. The end, that is, until the February visit rolls around and the smiles and friendships begin anew.

Students from The Sullivans Elementary School and visiting students from Katoh Elementary School in Shizuoka Prefecture race against time matching shapes while playing the game Perfection during a school exchange held Oct. 28.
Photo by Nicki Salter