Meditations in Color

Artists speak in color. It is a universal language. Over the centuries some of the most eloquent artists have given us much inspiration. Leonardo da Vinci, Michaelangelo, Raphael are a few such masters. Especially Beato Angelico comes to mind. His lovely "Annunciation of Mary" at St. Mark's in Florence (Italy) is a meditation in itself, almost mystical.

A genius of another kind is America's artist Norman Rockwell. He didn't portray biblical or religious scenes as such. But he had a unique gift to take every-day people in common-place situations and reveal the deeper meaning of the soul.

Looking at the world through Norman Rockwell's eyes is a journey into the realm of the common man. He took everyday folk and lifted them up so all could see their beauty — part community, part humor and wit and part soul. For each one of his paintings some of life's values hang with it. Norman Rockwell invited all to enter into his work much like a good neighbor would invite a close friend to share a cool drink on a hot summer's day. In this sense

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Saying Grace

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In His Spirit

he was in communion with all his fellow man for in them he saw himself, his God and all that society holds dear.

With reverent humor Norman Rockwell lifted up prayer in family life and bids us to share in his "Saying Grace" implying that prayer is a welcome companion at any table.

Norman Rockwell cried out "Freedom" for all men in "Four Freedoms" encouraging all Americans to hold dear "Freedom of Speech", "Freedom from Fear", "Freedom of Worship" and "Freedom from Want". He encourages us to reverence our freedom and to do something about it in time of war and peace.

Young people must have been his favorite models. He used them so often. Their spontaneity and innocence literally radiate from his canvases. Probably because there was so much of the youthfulness in his own heart. And then, who can ever forget those marvelous Boy Scout calendars that he had painted for fifty years. Whether humorous or inspirational, they speak of the hopes and aspirations of all young people!

In his later work "Peace Corps", he shares the spirit of President John Kennedy's concern for the poor. By his selection of subjects he often implied that we should be socially involved with the family of man. We should be caring and concerned for the world as our community.

His favorite holiday was Christmas. He felt that every day should be Christmas reflecting its spirit. Through his vision and selection of subjects he captured important values for each of us to hold and cherish.

Norman Rockwell shared a reverence for life. He taught us to reverence each other's presence and savor the humor of day to day moments, counting our freedoms and blessings as we go. The sampling of his work on these pages encourages prayer and social consciousness of the poor and needy of the world, as well as a growing awareness of treasured friends. He lifted up the needy and told the emotional story of every day folk for our outreach. His painting "The Golden Rule" says it so clearly, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." He encourages us to "Lift Up Thine Eyes" and to be aware of the church inviting and needing our involvement.

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Lift Up Thine Eyes

Lastly Norman Rockwell stated by his life that a man can be counted by the expression of his countenance and actions. One man's journey and vision do make a difference and he bids us to treasure what is important, see our fellow man and reverence life to the smallest moment. Each person is a philosopher and makes a statement no matter how silent a life or hidden an existence.

We are grateful to Norman Rockwell for speaking so clearly to us. He still lives in his paintings. He still makes us laugh, helps us pray and celebrate life. We celebrate his memory and his contribution to Art, but more importantly we bless his contribution to his fellow man, the values America holds dear and the religious aspects of ordinary moments which speak to us of our values and our God.

Norman Rockwell is perhaps the Thoreau of painting with his "Walden" as the expression of the human face. So much of his work was brushed with his soul and spoke of the values we celebrate today. He is not only an artist philosopher of the common man, but also a soul still singing in his silence reverencing God, man and religion in life. His silence still speaks. ■