

Sunday, May 8, 2016
EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

Islam

This coming Wednesday, May 11, at 7:00 in the evening, Imam Abdullah from the Nasreen mosque in San Luis Obispo will speak at the Women's Guild meeting. It is an excellent opportunity to gain some understanding of the beliefs and customs of Islam.

Islam was founded about 500 years or so after Christianity. It is more or less the same size as Catholicism, over one billion members. It is a faith, then, that cannot easily be dismissed and, as one of the three monotheistic religions of the world, merits attention and understanding. Indeed, all religions ought to respect and cooperate with one other. Pope Francis is a visible example of this, communicating often with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, traveling to Sweden to commemorate the anniversary of Protestantism, meeting with the Russian Patriarch and, in this Year of Mercy, reaching out to the dissident Pius X Society. All who believe in God must work as allies with each other. There is no place for hatred, suspicion or persecution in religion.

Imam Abdallah also professes this same attitude. Not only has he agreed to come to our parish but he has participated in a number of other ecumenical ventures, e.g., sitting on a religious panel, with a local rabbi, Protestant pastor, Buddhist, and me, to discuss Pope Francis's' encyclical on the environment. He has talked in Protestant churches in San Luis Obispo explaining the tenets of Islam, defusing misunderstandings and misinterpretations. He also has invited other faiths – and the wider public – to visit the mosque.

While the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are very distinct, they also have similar features. All claim Abraham as their Father in faith. Judaism is derived from Isaac, Abraham's son by Sarah, while Islam is derived from Ismael, Abraham's son by Hagar. Jesus clearly belongs to the prophetic tradition of Judaism, and Islam explicitly acknowledges him as such. All maintain a belief in one God, though this is obviously stronger in Judaism and Islam, which deny the Trinity. Resurrection, a relatively recent development in Judaism at the time of Jesus, is a central belief in both Islam and Christianity. Love is fundamental to all three, though not always consistently preached or practiced. In the name of God and truth, all three have persecuted and killed heretics and non-believers. Many rituals are similar, and even borrowed from one another. Fasting, for example, is common to all three, especially in certain sacred seasons: Yom Kippur, Lent, and Ramadan. All these similarities, among others, could promote a better religious appreciation and cooperation, stimulating a positive influence on the world which needs the values of religion to guide and direct it.