

Tribal

I dare say that most of you would not want to watch TV with me: I'm addicted to PBS and the History Channel, which means that I watch a lot of boring "educational" programs. I recall one show in particular: a travelogue where the camera took us on a tour of Brittany – the westernmost peninsula of France that sticks out into the Atlantic Ocean. The Breton people have deep Celtic roots, which are evident in their traditions and their language. You see, Brittany's distance from Paris and the legendary stubbornness of the Breton people have allowed Breton language and culture to resist the homogenizing pressure exerted by the capital and by the dominant "French" culture. This strong attachment to ancient cultural expressions led the host of the TV show to remark, "it feels tribal!"

This recalled for me my own experience. You see, when I was studying in Paris, some friends took me out to Brittany to celebrate the 50th wedding anniversary of their grandparents. This foreigner, already struggling with French language and culture, was plunged into yet another cultural reality. The travelogue that evening was like a flashback. I heard the same songs which Bretons have sung for centuries. I saw the same circle dances where, instead of holding hands, dancers link their little fingers; in these dances, symbolic of the circle of eternity and the life cycle, old people dance together with the young, passing on to future generations the heritage received from past generations. They live their unique identity, they celebrate it, and they hand it on. Tribal is a good word for it.

Le cousin américain was invited into their life to share the tribal celebration. One specific example of this came at dinner. Well-oiled by fine wine, a man stood up and started to sing. After the song, all the ladies got up and ran around the table to kiss the singer. Then a lady got up to sing, and received a tornado of kisses from all the men. When all had gotten into the act, they turned to me and issued the order which this shy introvert had been dreading: "*Jacques, chantez!*" No protests could get me out of singing. I couldn't sing anything familiar to them; I could only offer something from my own cultural heritage: this home-sick American stood up and sang a song of homesickness, "Shenandoah". As they say, "there wasn't a dry eye in the house", and my cheeks took a week to recover from all the kisses! Tribes had touched and been enriched.

As I stood in the sanctuary of St. Nicholas Cathedral for the Divine Liturgy celebrating the centennial, I had a *déjà-vu* moment. Tribal it was! Under the gentle leadership of our beloved +Lubomyr, Ukrainian Catholic hierarchs, clergy, and faithful re-enacted the rituals in which our people have for over a millennium re-affirmed our faith in the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ and embraced by Volodymyr.

Thankfully, we were able to share that moment with guests of our "tribe": with our beloved Orthodox friend +Vsevolod, a man of deep faith who shares our culture, who joined us from a place of honor just in front of the icon screen; with Melkite +Nicholas Samra, who shares our Byzantine Rite and our Catholic Communion but not our Ukrainian culture; with four Roman Catholic bishops, who share neither our Ukrainian culture nor our Byzantine Rite, but who are in union with us thanks to our mutual communion with the Bishop of Rome. Tribes touched and were enriched. We relived the reality of which the psalmist sings:

Sing a new song, you faithful,
Praise God in the assembly.
Israel, rejoice in your Maker,
Zion in your King.
Dance in the Lord's Name,
Sounding harp and tambourine.
The Lord delights in saving a helpless people.
Revel in God's glory,
Join in clan by clan.
(Psalm 149)

-Fr. Jim Karepin, op