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When Tempted by Sanity . . .

By Paul Anderson

In THE well-known musical Man of La Mancha, Don Quixote sets off as a knight-errant on a quest to right the world's wrongs and to fight for the truth no matter the cost. He is joined, of course, by Sancho Panza, who believes that he will profit from sharing the spoils of their adventures. Jousting at windmills and challenging passersby as evil knights to be dealt with, however, Quixote comes across as a poor fool who is out of touch with reality. His image has even been stamped indelibly upon the English language in the form of an adjective: "quixotic," which implies the foolhardy pursuit of lofty ideals.

One of the climactic scenes in the musical portrays Quixote's dialogue with Dulcinea, the tavern maid he regards as the lady in whose service his quest is dedicated. Her real name is "Aldonza," but he insists on calling her "Dulcinea," a name denoting sweetness and purity. This is all the more striking as a few scenes earlier amid the mule drivers' chanting "Food! Wine! Aldonza!" the audience is made entirely aware that she is anything but sweet and pure. And yet, Quixote continues to call her Dulcinea.

During this scene Aldonza turns to him and yells something like, "All of this is insanity! I am not Dulcinea; I am Aldonza! Why can't you see me as I am?" To this Quixote replies, "What is sanity? To see the world as it is, or to see the world as it could be?" Eventually, Aldonza begins to refer to herself as Dulcinea too. All things have indeed begun to become new.

Sometimes when we look at the church and our contributions to it we may feel more like Aldonza than Dulcinea. We become painfully aware of our own inadequacies, let alone the shortcomings of those who give Christianity a bad name. Christian celebrities who become exposed as profiteers, exemplaries that disappoint, hopeful strugglers that continue to do little more than just that: struggle—all of these remind us of the very human character of the church. It seems unbelievable that God should love the unlovely enough to send His Son to die for us. And yet, He has. This applies to the churched as well as the unchurched. Christ sees us as we are—and also what we can become.

Like Quixote's esteem for Aldonza, God loves transforming love. We have loved Him, loved us first difference (1 John it's not because any of us should sians 2:8-9); our is like filthy rags What seems like foolishness in the eyes is experienced power of God all who believe. righteousness is received through faith alone (Romans 1:16-17).

As the Hound of Heaven pursues us, as the Lover seeks the beloved, God the initiator of the human/divine love affair calls us into responsive fellowship with Himself. Even our hunger for God is already a response to His secret working in our hearts. Like the purification of the Bride before the marriage of the Lamb, this divine initiative is the basis of our humble adoration and our joyous service (Revelation 19:7-10). We can love because Jesus Christ first loved us.

The Church of Jesus Christ is not a select group of people who have no problems. It is the Company of the Committed, who in response to God's loving initiative have said "Yes" to His transforming gift of grace. We do not gather for worship because we "have it all together"; we gather because we need it and yearn to be continually formed and reformed in the image of our Lord. He invites us to come to Himself just as we are, and yet, He also fills us with the power to become all we can be. That is "Good News" worth celebrating!

Man of La Mancha closes with Quixote on his deathbed. Surprisingly, though the singing of "The Impossible Dream" is taken up not only by Quixote, but also by Dulcinea and Sancho Panza. What began as a lampoon of lofty idealism concludes as a statement about the transforming power of redemptive vision. It's like seeing the world and ourselves through the eyes of Jesus. When tempted by sanity—to see things as they are and no more—may we be drawn to the redemptive alternative, to see things as they could be . . . and no less.