

27 September 2009
Fr. Richard L. Green

I'd like to extend a welcome to everybody who's visiting with us today—it's really nice not to see so much wood when I look out here.

One of the things that happen in communities is rather illustrated by the presence of HYC with us today. Communities are really good things. They provide us with some sense of security. They provide us with a sense of identity at times. They can provide support for us. They can provide us with our livelihood.

But communities can also be closed and become rigid and have tight, tightly defined borders of what's allowed and what's not. They can be so definitive and have so much, shall we say, integrity that they become ossified; they become bone-like, they become like rock so that there's no room for growth, that we are stifled in those communities.

It's always interesting to hear when congregations start talking about how they want to grow and the question of course has to be: Oh, really? So you want to bring in a lot of new people who might have different ideas and experience into your congregation and you're going to fully include them and their ideas and their ideas about how things ought to be done. Do you really want to grow? Do you really want to be transformed? Because every time a new person walks in the doors of a church the congregation is changed. Every time.

And it's not just people coming in off the street; its people growing up in our midst. Do we keep the young people that grow up in our churches always infantilized, always just a little kid? They're twenty-five years old and you still don't give them a voice in the operations of the church. Or are we truly open, truly open, to receiving what is brought in from the outside or grows up in our midst.

John in this story in the Gospel is really illustrating to us that this is not a new issue. This is the first century; this is in Jesus' entourage. John comes around and says: "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" like he's tattling on somebody to the playground proctor. "We saw this guy and he was casting out demons in your name and he's not one of us! We tried to stop him." Really expecting a lot of praise, I'm sure: "Oh, good job, John!" No, no, that's not what Jesus said at all.

I'm sure there was long pause—I can see it—as Jesus is looking at him and just long enough to let John start to squirm a little bit as it starts to sink in who it is he's talking to. Jesus seems to be saying to John, "John, let's risk it. Let's let him be. Let's not try to control everything. We don't know what gifts he might be bringing. We don't know what we might be losing out on if we force him to stop because he's not in *our* little group."

And then of course Jesus goes on in his own special way talking about ripping out eyes and stuff like that... but he's really trying to make a point here about obstacles, doing away with obstacles. Why would we stand in the way of someone doing good in Jesus'

name just because he doesn't happen to be with our little group? I think that the church is still wrestling with that some 2,000 years later and a lot of the controversy we see in the Anglican Communion go right back to this story. Ooh, he's not like us!

Look, one of the things that are striking to me about having the HYC here is that it brought up some old memories for me. It was 1965 or 6 and I was seventeen and it just so happens that I was the preacher on what we called Youth Sunday. That was the one Sunday of the year that we allowed anyone under the age of 50 to do anything and... So I was preaching, and in my own inimitable way I was—I had no idea what the propers were, what the Gospel was for the day, but just one little part of it.

I was quoting one of the prophets of that day—Bob Dylan. And they laughed. Hear that laugh. And it came up with all you [AYC] guys here...it came up for me again. And I prepared a cheat sheet but I think I can remember the words so I want to share what I shared with the congregation in 1966 and I don't think I can say it, I may have to sing it: (singing)

*Come mothers and fathers throughout the land
And don't criticize what you can't understand
Your sons and daughters are beyond your command
And your old road is rapidly aging
Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a-changing.*

What came to mind is I never expected to be on this end of that song. I'm sixty years old. My Bishop is fifteen years younger than I am. And yes, there are going to be those people in the congregation that say: 'Oh, you're just a kid yet.' But if you'll remember how you felt when you were sixty years old—twenty years ago—and heard me sing this song...uh, well, no...that was forty years a...anyway, anyway...there is something very powerful about that, that it just keeps turning, the wheel keeps turning and we can never feel like the wheel stops with us because we're not in the Kingdom yet.

Granted, we Boomers pretty much figured that we knew everything but, strange as it may seem, we didn't. We brought certain gifts. Our parents had brought certain gifts. The generations after us will bring gifts. We have to stay open. We have to stay fluid.

The passage to the Kingdom is a relay race. The baton gets passed from generation to generation, from whoever's in a church now to whoever walks in the door.

We have to stay fluid. We have to stay light. We have to stay fluid like the waters of our baptism that consecrate us each in our time and our own place with our own experiences to move forward to the Kingdom.

Amen.