

22 February, 2009
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This is the last Sunday after the Epiphany. Next Sunday will be the first Sunday of Lent. And the collect for this last Sunday of the Epiphany is, I think, an important collect for us to hold as we enter into this season of Lent.

That sentence, 'Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross [and here is the key:] *and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory.*' To be changed into his likeness from glory to glory.

Now, there's three parts in that sentence and I think it's important that we engage all three.

The first has to do with the recognition of the Christ and this light. The light of his countenance. And I think that that's the part that's in many ways the easiest.

To be then fed by that light so that we can be strengthened to bear our cross – to do whatever it is our lives involve.

To do whatever it is that will grow us is the most difficult - the transformation into his likeness from glory to glory.

Now, church spends a lot of good energy doing the first part. To some lesser degree the second, and unfortunately very little attention is paid to the third. As if we can say, "Lord, lord." We can give praise and thanks and that's enough. And maybe to gain just enough strength to get into church the next Sunday, just enough to get us through the week so we can stumble in here the *next* Sunday to get just enough to stumble in here again the Sunday after that and never really quite get ahead. Never really quite make any of the movement of transformation into the likeness of Christ. And that is the point of the whole enterprise.

So we're spending all of our time and energy on step one with very little attention on step three: Step three being the first step of the major part of why we're even created.

Well thank goodness for Lent. Now usually Lent is portrayed as that time where we beat ourselves up (or don't). Where we give up chocolate (that's always useful). But what it really is about is a time of being grabbed by the shoulders and shaken awake. It's a time of awakening. Not just of self-denial, though that may be part of what we need to be able to wake up. But it is an opportunity. And if you think of the timing of the opportunity, it's important. The Feast of the Resurrection, Easter, comes at the end of this time and it's a celebration of new life, of rebirth. And so if we look at that as symbolic of our journey and not just something we remember that Jesus did (and therefore we don't have to); the whole thing begins to take on a very personal if not global perspective.

If we look at Lent as this opportunity for us to engage in this transformation enterprise so that we may be transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ, to also receive as a result of that awakening new life, then we have truly followed Christ. Which is of course what we signed on for. Not just to have our names on the parish register and be busy-busy-busy down at the church, but to actually follow Christ in that movement of transformation where we become whole. Where we become healed. Where we become reconciled within ourselves, with one another, and with God.

That seems to me to be what this enterprise is about so that we don't just take that enlightenment and then hoard it by moving into a closet someplace, but that we let our personal transformation become one more step in God's creation process and God's ongoing project of creating the world that is intended. Inhabited by Christs.

That's a pretty tall order. And what happens so often is that we sit looking at that end result and just kind of throw up our hands and say, "IM-Possible. I know myself. And I know that to be impossible. Who do you think I am, Jesus Christ?"

And I think that that's what holds us back. We take humility and use it as an excuse for not being even who we are. Because who we are is brothers and sisters of Jesus the Christ. We're cut out of the same bolt of cloth. We're cut out of the same bolt of cloth.

Jesus was not something of a different type, of a different kind than we are. Just more so. He is held up as the prototype. This is who we are and his actions in the world, his words, his death and resurrection, all that is saying 'Come follow me.' This is the way we are to be! And he called us his brothers and sisters. He didn't call us **Earthlings**. You know, The Day the Earth Stood Still sort of thing. We are his brothers and sisters.

And it's saying to us, this is your story, too! These gospel narratives are showing us the way to be fully human. To grow up, to be who we truly are and that the spiritual life is about that journey of discovery and revealing of who we are.

I like to use the image (and some of you have probably heard this ad nauseum) but the image of a kerosene lamp with the glass chimney on it. And that the light, that little fire in there, is the Divine Light. And in most of us, that chimney is so sooted up that you can hardly see the little Divine Light. It's just this little faint glow in there.

But with Jesus, that chimney has been cleaned and polished to the point that yes, you can see that there is the glass chimney there, but mainly what you're aware of is the Divine Light shining through. And that our job as followers of Christ is the cleaning of that chimney. The cleaning away of all that stands between the Divine Light and the outside. And that we find that when our chimney becomes more and more clean we're more and more aware of the light shining in all these little lamps around us. And in fact, that light comes from the same source.

So here's Lent. And it is a call for us to stop. Just pause, just for a little bit. All of us live in Bedlam. Yes, you think you're well organized, you've got a BlackBerry,

Or maybe you walk the lake but instead of putting Guns N' Roses in your ears, maybe you actually see what's going on around. See the ducks. See the other people. Experience the temperature. Notice the reflections in the water. Maybe it's when you do your prayer. Or maybe it's when you do your interior silence.

Maybe you start doing meditations. Maybe you start doing yoga. Maybe you do whatever it is that attracts you.

Whatever it is that begins to quiet down all that interior noise because the chances are pretty slim that you're going to quiet down the exterior noise. But to begin to calm all of that chatter and racket and 'Butterfly Mind', flitting from one thing to the next. Because it's when we begin to go deeper inside that we begin to encounter that quiet center which is the meeting place where we encounter the holy one.

Thomas Merton was a great 20th century saint. He was a Trappist monk. He was a hermit for the last years of his life, and there is an entire library filled with his works alone, his writings. In his book, No Man is an Island, he wrote this (in the days before we were sensitive to inclusive language, so bear with me):

There must be a time of day when the man who makes plans forgets his plans and acts as if he has no plans at all.

There must be a time of day when the man who has to speak falls very silent and his mind forms no more propositions and he asks himself, "Did they have a meaning?"

There must be a time when a man of prayer goes to pray as if it were the first time in his life he had ever prayed.

When the man of resolutions puts his resolutions aside as if they had all been broken and he learns a different wisdom.

Distinguishing the sun from the moon, the stars from the darkness, the sea from the dry land, and the night sky from the shoulder of the hill.

Amen.