

Easter VII, 2008
May 4, 2008
Jn 17.1-11
Fr. M. Dow Sanderson

+++

One of the things that all of us experience, if we live long enough, is that life continually places us in moments of transition... and that there is often great tension in these “in between times”. Every parent knows that getting a teenager safely through those often tumultuous years can seem to take an eternity.

And then comes the transition to being an “empty nester” What on earth to do with no more car pools and soccer games and swim meets?

And then there are many... after a lifetime of work... who find the transition to retirement very difficult... Living in the tension of the unknown...can make us uncomfortable...

In the year of our Lord’s crucifixion, the disciples and friends of Jesus went through a similarly painful emotional journey.

Never mind that Jesus had preached and taught that he must die and be raised... We all know that while we smile and nod our heads agreeably at theological talk... truly appropriating such lofty notions into the fabric of our lives does not occur easily nor instantaneously.

The women going to the tomb with spices to anoint the body expected to find a dead Jesus. They were on a mission of duty, not of faith.

Mary Magdalene expected a grave over which to grieve... not a living man walking about whom she mistook for the gardener.

Thomas was shaken by grief so profound that the mention of a Risen Jesus served only to raise his blood pressure. His annoyance at what surely seemed to be the cloying sentimentality of the deluded is something with which many of us can so identify. The grinning disciples must have seemed to him to be like the well-intentioned, and yet always annoying person who spouts platitudes to the bereaved at all the wrong times.

And Simon Peter who had seen Jesus face to face after the resurrection not once but twice didn’t have a clue as to how to proceed with the establishing of a Church.

The Lord had died. The Lord had been raised. The Lord had spoken. The Lord had breathed on them the spirit of ordination.

And yet... they remained numb, disoriented...bewildered.

And in the moment, the one thing that seemed sensible was to return to their history... and the consolation of tradition.

Peter turned to James and John and the others and simply said, Boys, lets go fishing.

And that is precisely what they did. And while out in the boat Jesus appeared to them yet a third time. There was the miraculous catch of fish, the breakfast on the beach., and that tender moment of true reconciliation between Simon Peter the denier and Jesus the forgiver.

Simon, Son of John, do you love me?
Feed my Sheep.

And so they were finally beginning to understand. It was sinking in... The numbness was fading and they were returning to some semblance of normalcy...

And then, just as they thought they might actually string two good days together... it happened.

While they were gazing at him, the Jesus who had been raised from the dead was lifted up from their sight... And Jesus the Christ, True God and True Man was exalted on high, where he would forever reign over the church, intercede for it, plead the case of sinners as Great High Priest before the Father.

It all made such good theological sense.... (And may I say... blessings and crowns in heaven for the 17 souls who came out Thursday morning and the 60 Thursday night to help us keep the feast)....

But for all the intellectual assent...from an emotional perspective... it must surely have felt like yet another absence... A painful transition... and the familiar numbness set in once again.

Even two thousand years later, we get a glimpse. As Fr. Dan read the Gospel last Thursday night, the Paschal Candle, which had burned for forty days was extinguished.

And as the Gospel Procession made its way back to the chancel, just a few wisps of smoke lingered in the air...appropriately reflecting our reluctance to loosen our grip on the things we can see and touch, as we are beckoned by the Church through the ages to move to a deeper comprehension of Our Lord's Presence.

It is a discomfoting thing...living in the "in-between" times. The Lord has been exalted.... The Spirit has been promised... And we are called to wait... to expect.

Again, we see the lessons of Holy Scripture. If we read just a few verses further in the lesson from Acts this morning, we learn that the infant church gathers itself during this same ten-day period between Ascension and Pentecost.

And again, as they wait expectantly, they turn to history and tradition in order to move forward.

The Lord had selected 12 Apostles. Twelve Bishops to represent the 12 Tribes in the New Israel.

Judas, one of those 12 was no more... and so it was fitting that the CHURCH restore what the Lord had intended.

It is a blessing to our Anglo-Catholic hearts to see that the Biblical model is for the restoration of Catholic order as preparatory for Spiritual renewal.

+++++

In the Book of Revelation we read, The Tabernacle of God is With Men again. And Blessed John further tells us of his vision of heaven: And I saw no Temple in the City.

These two verses mean to us that Jesus Christ, Incarnate, Crucified, Risen and Exalted, is the Tabernacle, the meeting place, the intersection between God and Man. He himself is the New Temple, torn town, but raised up in three days.

The Great Divorce is reconciled

God has reclaimed and redeemed his creation.

Or as Fr. Patrick put it in his fine sermon Thursday night: The resurrection is victory over death... the Ascension is victory over history. The day to day foibles of our chronological time are received and vindicated within God's eternal Kairos time.

Now, it may not always feel that this is so.

Both individually and corporately, griefs will still come. We will have our moments of numbness, of disillusionment, of heartbreak and fear...

But when one of us is weak, the rest are strong. For we are one Body.

We know our story. We know our history. We know the sacred traditions passed down to us.

We cling to them. They are immovable. For the Church is not wood nor stone, but the faithful united to their Lord. Even in the worst of times, we have confidence that her doors are always open to us... and that we will always find refuge, healing and redemption.

And so my brothers and sisters, here we are again. We come to the end of the Easter Season. Christ has ascended. The Spirit is promised... And we wait expectantly... And the Spirit Comes. And we are made whole.

Come Holy Spirit. Fill the hearts of your people. And kindle in us the Fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth

+++Amen