

Homily – The Transformation of Our Church

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I think we all remember the frog prince fairy tale. The girl meets a frog. Even though it is a frog, for a variety of reasons she kisses the frog, and instantly and magically it becomes a handsome prince.

Sometimes the moral of this story is that the girl saw past the ugliness of the frog and was rewarded with a handsome prize.

Now, there are variations of the frog prince story.

A boy kisses the frog and it becomes a beautiful princess.

Or, the frog is kissed and it stays a frog.

Or, the frog is kissed and it becomes a frog prince, or a dog, or it disappears. There are many variations of the frog prince story.

One variation that I have never heard is that the frog is kissed and that it takes three to five years to become a prince. This length of time for a transformation would seem to pass far beyond our level of patience and would take away much of our excitement. No matter how the frog changes, in our fairy tale we want it to be instantaneous. We like quick change, and sometimes is the way that it works in real life.

Sometime love happens pretty quickly. Sometimes you can tell in the first hour that there is going to be a lifelong connection with another person. This is pretty close to love at first sight. And, when a baby is born there is immediate change for a family. There is instant and complicated change to the mother's body, and big changes for the entire family. It will never be the same.

Today in our Scripture readings we have examples of change. The first is the transfiguration of Jesus as described in the Gospel of Matthew. *"And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white."*

The transfiguration of Jesus is the moment two thousand years ago when the divine nature of Jesus was revealed to some of his Disciples. Peter, John, and James were there to see Jesus in a transformed way, and see him standing with some of the most important saints in history of Israel, Moses and Elijah. And the voice of God is heard saying, *"This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"*

Theologians would say that in today's Gospel reading, nothing changed about Jesus, nothing changed about Christ. However, the divine nature of Jesus is revealed to us.

Our human understanding of Jesus is changed in a flash. Now, one of the curious things about this transformation is that it is still not universally understood or accepted. So, in some ways an instant change is still not complete. Will it ever be? Will Jesus ever be more widely accepted? And this begs the question, what can we do to share that revelation?

Our Old Testament reading is also about change. It is a big and rather instant change for Moses as he went up the mountain into the presence of the Lord, and he was given the stone tablets which contained the first sharing of the Ten Commandments. This is the beginning of the laws that continue to shape at least three of the world's major spiritual traditions – Jewish tradition, Christian tradition and Moslem tradition. This was change that began more than three thousand years ago. But again, it is change that was more widely accepted in some ages and less in others.

As a side note, Moses connects our two Scripture readings. Fifteen hundred years after he came down the mountain, Moses is seen with Jesus and Elijah as the nature of Jesus is revealed to some of his Disciples.

But, back on the topic of change... it comes in all varieties doesn't it? Sometimes change is a long time coming and then happens in an instant. Sometimes change happens in an instant and then takes years or centuries to become complete.

Sometimes change itself takes a while and all of a sudden you realize that change was completed without your notice. A cut may be stinging for several days and then a few days later you realized that it is gone and you haven't been feeling the sting for several days. Or, you look at a child and realize she is not a child anymore. Is that instant change, or change that was a long time coming?

And, here is a personal story about change. Back when I was a Finance Director at Hewlett-Packard we went through a lot of change. The corporate culture of the HP Way had been put away, and a new corporate culture was being rolled out, tops down. I remember that one of the uncomfortable things for many of us was that there was actually a substantial time gap between the departure of the old culture and the adoption of the new culture. I have read articles that say that it takes three to five years for a new culture to take hold, and part of my tenure at HP was with the old culture and part of my tenure was also with this gap period.

The gap period can be uncomfortable, because it is a period without a culture. And, you end up longing for the culture that has gone away, and impatient for the new culture, even when you're not really sure what it is going to be. The three to five year gap period between cultures is a time of discomfort. You long for the past, but can't

speed up the future. It is a time of heavy lifting as you get ready but can't fast forward into the future. Be that as it may, where is instant change when you want it?

However, for large organizations, heavy lifting and a gap period are usually needed, and it is also needed in our churches. We may long for the church that used to be, and wonder what the new church will look like. For the church, the in between time is uncomfortable especially when we know the Holy Spirit is at work doing something. Something is percolating and it won't look like the way we did church one hundred or even fifty years ago.

Last week I shared that much of the turmoil in our world is because our churches have gone astray and failed to shine the light of Christ into a world that sorely needs it. Our churches need to recenter on the love of Christ. Last week I said that here at St. Barnabas we want to be a community of love that arms us each with the skills of love. These skills include:

"common courtesies,
gratitude,
admitting weaknesses and failures,
self-awareness of our own emotions and attitudes,
expressing hurt or disappointment,
forgiving and even reconciling when possible,
asking for help,
differing graciously,
surfacing and negotiating competing desires,
taking the first step to resolve conflicts,
upholding wise boundaries,
saying yes and no,
winning and losing graciously,
creating win-win outcomes,
speaking truth in love,
speaking truth to power,
asking good questions,
requesting feedback,
expressing affection,
opening one's heart,
giving gifts, and
seeking wise counsel."

In your bulletin today is an extra handout that lays out these twenty-two skills of love and the handout asks you three questions about these skills. Which ones are you already pretty good at? Which skills would you like to improve in yourself? And finally, which of these skill could you help others improve? Let us know your

responses by handing the filled in form back to us. Your name is optional on the form.

In the thirteenth century St. Bonaventure wrote a poem called "Taken from The Journey of the Mind to God". Here is the poem.

*"Do not assume that mere
Reading will suffice without fervor,
Speculation without devotion,
Investigation without admiration,
Observation without exaltation,
Industry without piety,
Knowledge without love,
Understanding without humility,
Study without divine grace."*

And, to this I would add healthy change without heavy lifting. We are only going to get better at the skills of love with hard work.

God created each and every one of us with an immortal diamond inside of us. We are made in the image of God, though it is an imperfect image. Over the next few years we have some heavy lifting in our own life journey and here at our parish. We want to help you go deeper in your spiritual journey with God, others, and self. We want to help you navigate a world that is in turmoil in a way that reflects Jesus.

We will certainly keep our focus on God, and as we march towards our annual observance of Holy Week, our eyes will focus on the Cross and the empty tomb. Our primary goal is to worship God, draw closer to Jesus, and go deeper spiritually.

I wonder what areas of heavy lifting you are focused on so that we can better reveal God to the world. I wonder what we can do to be the hands and feet of Christ in the South County. I wonder what we can do to be open to the working of the Holy Spirit as we are called into our future. This change isn't instantaneous transformation but will take another few years. And, at some point we will look back with twenty twenty hindsight and realize what God had been doing in the world.

The heavy lifting can be like being called to kiss the frog before beautiful things can be revealed. We have to get dirty. And, we know there is no instant, magical transformation of our church, but we do have the power of the Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit come! And, fill this place and fill us so that we can do the ministries and heavy lifting that you are revealing to us. Come!