

## The Last Sunday after the Epiphany, 2018

Homily by Fr. Glen Gleaves

The people of faith see something beyond this world, something which is not always obvious to hard-headed realists.

The theme today on this Last Sunday after the Epiphany is *CHANGE*...

Question: How many Episcopalians does it take to change a light bulb?

Answer: *CHANGE??!?* My *grandfather* gave that light bulb!!!

Today is just your average Sunday Eucharist. –Wait a minute: Just? Average?? – *This is the most sacred mystery we have!* There is no *just* or *average* about it! As such, like *every* Eucharist, we remember and celebrate Jesus' life, death and resurrection from the dead, as we repeat his words and actions at his *first* Eucharist. Those words and actions recall his presence among us again. Or bring us to him. Or both.

Jesus' words and actions –and presence– remind us, once again this week, that his gift to us gentiles is that we Christians are now grafted onto the True Vine of God's people and are included in his promise of Eternal Life with him.

Here, he invites us to share in a meal with him –which is but a hint of that Great Banquet we'll someday enjoy with the God we've come to know as Father, Son and Holy Spirit –and we'll share it with all the heavenly host, and prophets, and martyrs and saints of all time.

The gospel lesson for this week is from St. Mark's version of Jesus' Transfiguration—a kind of *Vision Quest* [see retired Alaska Bishop Steven Charleston's book, The Four Vision Quests of Jesus —the Transfiguration was Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> *vision Quest* (1: *desert after baptism*; 2: *Transfiguration*; 3: *Gethsemane*; 4: *Golgotha*)], where, upon the mountain, he encountered Moses and Elijah. From this point, he was re-directed toward Jerusalem for his last time. It was to be *there*, where he was to endure his *changing* experience of passion, death and Resurrection –which, of course, is what Sundays are all about for us Christians –the weekly reminder that we are *changed into* EASTER people by his Resurrection.

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This Wednesday we enter into the long, six-week season of Lent. It's a time when we ponder *change*.

And during this season of Lent, we focus on two primary themes:

- How sin separates us from God; and,
- How death separates us from life.

Both themes imply transformation, how encountering the Holy can *change* us back into a right relationship with God when we've drifted away, and that, in our human condition, we need to acknowledge that we *do* drift away.

Our religious life is really all about personal change, transfiguration: our first one takes place at *BAPTISM*, when we are changed into a child of God. Through liturgical action, we enter into Jesus' death and resurrection, as our sin is sacramentally washed away, and the Holy Spirit enters us and empowers us into New Birth, into *eternal life*.

Eternal Life is the promise he gave us, and the Church shouts it from the rooftops!

Some of you may remember the days when we "did" private baptisms on Saturday afternoons, to "get Johnny or Jenny 'done.'" It was sometimes called "christening."

These days, the Church understands –and teaches– that we *christen* ships... but we **baptize** people! And we celebrate such a Rite of Passage as the whole Body of Christ, gathered together on the Lord's Day!!

At the moment of baptism –and indeed, throughout any Christian's life– there is but a thin veil between "this life" and "the next." Indeed, they are **not separate at all**, but are the same, a *continuum* of time and place. ALL those who have gone before us –the saints of our family –siblings, parents, grandparents, friends, the saints of the Church –*known and unknown*– are not gone, BUT merely changed, in their final transfiguration. As we, too, will be.

At our baptism, when we enter into the beginnings of our resurrected state.

So too, at every **burial** we do, the Church celebrates the Resurrection promised to us. At burials, we rehearse, and lift up our highest, most sacred theology for all to see and hear, from the bible and in our prayers. At these liturgies, the mourners are reminded of just how thin this veil is between bodily life and resurrected life – and that, in the midst of death, we are in Life –and therefore, deep joy. Not happiness, but deep joy, through our faith.

In fact, the promise we celebrate at baptisms, and REITERATE at our burials, is the same promise –and that promise is that of being transfigured into living the resurrected life, into the Nearer Presence of God! One day, we'll go to sleep in what we *thought* was the Last Best Place, and wake up ...*in Paradise!*

Until we get there for good, burials in the Episcopal Church are one of the best evangelism tools our church has. What a promise! What a life we have *to live into*, in the meantime!

So, FOR NOW, our humble eucharistic table –the altar– and our **weekly** meal–serve as reminders that Jesus comes to us in the sacramental elements of bread and wine, to feed and empower us, until we enter into the Nearer Presence of God, and find our place at the Great Banquet Table.

Using St. Paul's wonderful metaphor we all know, we will see God's glory "through a glass, dimly." We do so at *this* table today.

In our lives, we've seen the Glory of God break through in many other ways, too... but often, we often must look back, in order to see where God has been. Hindsight, they say, is 20-20.

A very few times in our life, though, we know God's unmistakable presence, as did Peter, James and John that day of Jesus' Transfiguration. ==> *Always be ready for that*, lest you miss those moments. "God-moments" pass us by all the time. Always be ready to be surprised.

And above all, know that, when you encounter God on *this side* of that thin veil that separates us from the fullness of God's glory, *know* that God's glory *on the other side* is so infinitely grander. And to that glory, God calls us all home!

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In a *radical shift of metaphors*, I've got a story for you...

Many years ago, there was a little boy who lived way back out in the country. He had reached the ripe old age of 12 and had *never in all his life* seen a circus. Therefore, you can imagine how excited he was one day when a circus poster went up at school that said on the next Saturday a **traveling circus** was coming to town.

He ran home with the glad news, and then, finally, he managed to stammer out his question, "**Dad, can I go?**"

The family was **poor**, but the father *knew* about circuses, and, so he said to his son, "**If you will do your Saturday chores ahead of time, I'll see to it that you have the money to go.**"

Come Saturday morning the chores were done, and the young boy stood, excitedly, by the breakfast table, all dressed and ready to go. His father reached down into a deep pocket of his overalls and pulled out a dollar bill -- *the most money the boy had ever had at one time in all his life!* The father cautioned him to be careful, and then sent him on his way.

The boy was so excited that his feet hardly touched the ground all the way to town! When he finally got there, he noticed that people were lining the streets and so he worked his way through the crowd until he could see what was coming.

--And there in the distance approached the spectacle of a circus parade, the likes of which he had never imagined. It was the *grandest* thing this boy had ever laid eyes on!

There were great yellow tigers and roaring lions in cages; there were brass bands with big bass drums, and midgets with trained dogs, and fire eaters, and acrobats doing cartwheels, and more things to see than this boy could have ever imagined!!

And who came bringing up the rear of the parade, but a circus clown, with big ol' floppy shoes and baggy pants, a great big flower on his lapel. He had a

splendid shock of orange hair and a grin the size of the whole county! What a clown he was (!! ) –*marching to the beat of the big bass drum.*

As the clown passed by where the boy was standing, he reached into his pocket and got out that precious dollar bill. He handed the money to the clown; then the boy turned around, all excited, and ran home.

What had happened? *The boy thought he had seen the circus!* But all he had seen was a preview, a glimpse, a foretaste,

**--of a wonderful performance that was yet to come under the big top. -  
-but, at least, he'd had a glimpse!**

The Bible, too, is full of *glimpses* of things to come.

So it was that day when Peter, James and John saw Jesus *transfigured* before their eyes upon that mountaintop. They saw him there, speaking with Moses and Elijah. What a day!! What a *mountaintop religious experience* for these three men!!! But Jesus told them *not to tell anyone about it until after 'the Son of Man' had risen from the dead.* What?? *How do you hold something like that in??*

They didn't have the whole picture yet, though they *thought* they did. There was more to come.

**But:** we know the story of Jesus' rising from the dead. And, like every person of faith who has gone before us, we, too, *hope* in the resurrection.

Unlike Peter, James and John, ***we know the whole story! And we can tell it !!*** There are folks out there who want to hear, *need* to hear it. . . ***Share it! It's too good to keep to yourself.***

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Our hope can help us get ready in time.

Our faith leads us to the parade.

Parades help us to believe in the Great Circus to Come.

We've been to that parade before; sometimes it doesn't move us.

But sometimes, we've joined in, marching in step *right behind the clown* for a ways; and someday we **know** that we'll find ourselves marching behind that clown, right *into* That Great Big Top With Three Rings and Acts more marvelous than we can possibly imagine until we get there....

Wait... *What's that...?*

Do I hear a drum??

*--Fr. Glen Gleaves on the Last Sunday After the Epiphany, 2018*