

The Paper Pulpit

(Reflections from the Pastor)

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

It was George Carlin, I think, who once said: “When I was born, I was so stunned that I couldn’t speak for two years!” There’s also a story about a young mother who described her delight in watching her new baby awake to more awareness. “She’s beautiful. She’s starting to vocalize a bit and smiles a lot when we talk to her. This morning, while her six year-old sister and I were having breakfast, I looked into the baby’s eyes and said, ‘Are you talking to me?’ She replied with something that sounded like ‘yeah!’ Her sister was so excited, ‘Mommy, she talked!’ I didn’t have the heart to tell her that it was just a random utterance.” This is a wonderful image, I believe, to describe what it will be like for each of us when we are born again into heaven. The maternal side of God will be looking us in the eyes, smiling, and trying to coax a smile and some words out of us, but we will be a bit too overwhelmed and underdeveloped to speak. The saints will be following our progress with joy, delighting in each of our little breakthroughs, as we awaken and struggle to learn the language of heaven.

A generation ago, C.S. Lewis wrote a brilliant little book on heaven, hell, and purgatory, entitled, *The Great Divorce*. In that book he stresses the moral continuity between this world and the next. However because Lewis wanted so much to emphasize that the way we shape our hearts in this world will determine how we respond to love in the next, the reader can easily get the impression that heaven is a lot like here, only nicer, that heaven will simply be our present life beautified. No doubt this is true, but our faith cautions us to not think of this too literally: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor is the human person even capable of imagining what God has prepared for those who love him.

Heaven is going to be wonderful, no doubt. However it isn’t going to be a simple extension of this life. Rebirth will be as much of a stretch for us as was our first birth. We will, after a period of purification, wake up in heaven, like an infant again, too overwhelmed to speak, needing to be coaxed into a new language and a new consciousness by God’s smile and the delight of the saints. Some of this, learning this new language and consciousness, is already possible for us here. We will have to try to learn the language of God’s stillness and divine quiet, in our own way. Perhaps it might be through our intimate relationships within marriage and family, where words at a point become superfluous; or perhaps it will be in our loneliness and solitude, where silence breaks through both so painfully and peacefully; or maybe it will be through the very tediousness of our daily tasks, where burdens often reduce us to silence; or perhaps it might be through teaching our own baby how to speak.

Jesus told us that each of us needs to be born again, once from below and once from above. We need also to be taught twice how to speak. Our mothers once gave us birth, from below, and they also coaxed and lured us into speech. Our second birth, our birth from above, will be somewhat similar. There will be time of having to leave the womb, the familiar, this life, and then a lonely journey down an unwanted birth canal into the greatest of all unknowns. Light, love, and community will greet us upon arrival. However it will be somewhat overwhelming, beyond language and imagination. We will be too stunned to speak, but God’s smile and the delight of the Saints will soon awaken within us a smile and evoke from us something that sounds like a “yeah!”

Diocesan Annual Appeal: Thank you to those who already made their pledge. In order to help us make our goal, three donors will pay up to \$4,500 if they are matched by new dollars (for a total of \$9,000) received from now until the end of March. There is no pledge too big or too small.

For those who have never pledged before there has never been a better time. I am really encouraging new/first time givers. We need everyone’s (not almost everybody’s) help. If you can only afford \$20 that is great and will be matched to become \$40. A \$50 donation will become \$100. The key is to have everyone pledge. For those who already made a pledge and want to take advantage of this offer, why not do so right now. Your additional pledge will also be matched.

When we go over our goal, 100% of the money comes back to the parish.

Please contact me directly if you have any questions or would like to make a pledge or make an additional pledge. It would be greatly appreciated. Additional pledge cards are available in the parish office or at the edge of your pews. Don’t wait.

Bible Study: Just a reminder there will be no Tuesday evening Mass or Bible Study on February 18th and 25th. Bible Studies to resume on March 4th.

In Christ, Fr. Jim Trempe