

Pink Pig Pitcher

Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent, February 25, 2024

Readings: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38; Psalm 22:22-3

Sermon text: He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. Mark 8:34

Bishop Mary Glasspool writes what she calls "an unofficial letter" each week. I'd like to share some of the insights of her letter this week with you, and then do a brief show and tell.

Mary wrote about the paradoxes in today's gospel, how willingness to lose one's life for the sake of the gospel is a way of saving it—whereas trying to avoid sacrifice ends up costing one's true and deep life.

She clarified a possible misconception: "'Taking up your cross' is not the unintentional situation you find yourself in as a result of the cards that life has dealt you, so to speak. The fact that I have a hearing defect, and the fact that a brick was once thrown through my car window, are *not* "the cross I bear". "*Taking up your cross*" indicates some kind of decision, choice, intentionality - not simply responding to the seeming randomness of life."

And she offered a suggestive interpretation of what taking up one's cross might mean. "I suggest," she wrote, "that at one level, the cross is the shadowy, frightening, shameful side of our own being. That is, often, the most difficult burden to bear, and may not be exchanged for something more heroic."

Here Glasspool brings in Carl Jung's idea of the shadow self, "that part of me that contains all the unwanted and undeveloped aspects of my personality, the things I am unaware of either because they are incompatible with my conscious personality or because they are potentials unknown to me - for example, sexual impulses, ambition, secret faults, and unused talents. The shadow is like another person in me; it has a personality all its own, one that is likely to be guilt-ridden and seemingly inferior, since it carries all the rejected aspects of my conscious personality. And the *reason* we try to make our shadow conscious, to get to know it, to accept and embrace that part of who we are, is *not* to rid ourselves of it, but rather, to integrate it"

And here is why we must *integrate* not *eliminate* our shadow self. It is in order to become whole and holy. She writes, "Holiness and wholeness are not to be achieved by cutting away an essential part of the self. It is human to have hateful, lustful, or envious thoughts and feelings. If we had no shadow at all, we

would be flat and dull, without substance or personality. The shadow gives us depth and character, and integrating it has the effect of filling out our personality, making us fully human and alive. Confronting, accepting, even *embracing* the "shadow parts" of ourselves - "taking up our cross" - can have a transforming effect, because when we deal responsibly with our faults_and failings, our jealousies and hatreds, our lack of self-esteem and our sinfulness - we are freed from its negative power."

Finally Bishop Mary brought home the main point: that the end or purpose of taking up one's cross is conversion, spiritual transformation of self and new life: "But *most* importantly, and where *conversion* can happen, is when we recognize in that shadowy side of ourselves - the places we usually avoid and fear - that these are places where we can meet, and recognize, and respond to God. God is there, too. And God's healing and surprising presence and activity there, will, indeed, transform our lives."

Here's end the sermon—for I can hardly improve or add to that, except perhaps to have a little show and tell.

A Lenten discipline I have taken on this year is cleaning the Rectory, beginning with the kitchen. Over the years, the cabinets have gotten stuffed with an assortment of pots, pans other cookware, flaky teflon pans, baked on crusty pots, all sorts of mismatched pieces. I threw a lot out, cleaned up the keepers, scrubbed down the shelves, and set everything in order—somewhat, part way, so far anyway.

Here is my favorite find: a pink pig pitcher (say that three times fast).

This I now think of as the container of my shadow self.

No longer hidden bad taste, full on gluttony and barely concealed anger—check out the eyes. I read deep self doubt combined with unmerited pride—you see the blue ribbon with a cross?- I could go on.

Or just ask Mary.

Of course it is so ugly it is cute.

Now imagine that instead of a silver cruet for the sacred wine we are going to use this. A clownish yet sad vessel for the sacred that's for sure. But do you think the sacrament will be any less holy, any less truly containing the real presence of Christ, his blood, his life?

I don't think so. Because it is God, not our power, our pride, that effects the transformation.

But of course the reason we use silver or glass cruets is we believe in offering our very best to honor God. Rightly so. Look at the gorgeous hand stitched needlework frontal and altar hangings we have out for Lent, the product of our needlework guild back in the fifties and sixties. Gorgeous stuff—and here is the other thing I want to show and tell you about. Check out this beautiful hand-stitched cross emblem— we actually have a photo of it dated December 12, 1954—and it is mentioned in an article from our one hundredth anniversary book about the needlework guild. The article tells the story of how Margaret Thorne Parshall brought Erika Wilson over from England to teach needlework and how she worked with Sallie Gifford O'Brien and others to create these beautiful pieces. But this piece has been buried in a box at the bottom of the sacristy cabinet because the silk backing was badly stained.

Members of the altar guild and I brought it out —I wondered what was in that box when I reached in to retrieve a dropped piece and we decided it is too good to let languish, but definitely needs restoration. So we have ordered a new silk frontal and we will restitch this emblem—carefully—thank you Lynda and Susan. An expert is coming up next month to look at our sacristy pieces as part of a historical project Sacristies of New York—and offer advice. When the restoration is done we will have a celebratory rededication.

I think this item illustrates another biblical truth. We are not only a composite of good and bad, beauty and ugliness, light and shadow, with a need to integrate them into a whole and holy person. We are created in the first place, fundamentally, in the image of God—creatures made in love and for love. But we have fallen out of harmony with God, others and creation. We have misused our freedom, and defaced our image. We are stained with sin. But Jesus came to restore our image. To take away the stain. He bears our sins and wounds so that we can come before God in our original wholeness. And even now we can give thanks to God who wonderfully created and yet more wonderfully restores us.

And so, whether on any given day you feel like a pink pig or a glorious tapestry, whether you are in good shape in a good setting, or in need of cleaning and restoration, or even if you find yourself buried in a dark place, feeling utterly alone with no one to see your beauty and recognize your usefulness. Remember that in all of these times and places, in different measures and ways, you are not alone. Remember you are beloved of God and a temple of the Holy Spirit. Always have been, always will be.

In Christ, Amen.

