



The Inclusive Community

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 15 2010

Luke 12: 49-56

Hope

Homily of Dr. George H. McDonald

In the Religious House in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, Barbara and I and our two children; another American couple and their son; a retired American school teacher; and two young Chinese college men, gathered for worship every morning at 6:30, in the small basement of our apartment.

The ambience of the basement was not nearly as bad as you might think. Because of the humidity, the basement was the only air conditioned room in the house. It was quiet. The decoration began with the reredos, a piece of felt in the appropriate liturgical color, behind our symbol for God – a double cross in black and red -- the unknown unknown!

We knelt on very inexpensive little tatami mats. Directions were given by ringing a small Buddhist bowl.

I took charge of making the symbols for the side walls – two posters, eight sided, like the I Ching, a cross in the center, surrounded by eight symbols. Like the medieval cathedrals, we surrounded ourselves with our saints. Since I can't draw people, we used/created an abstract symbol for each of them.

A few of the sixteen were from the Bible. From church history, we had Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley (for the Methodists in our midst), and Mateo Ricci, the first Christian missionary to modern China. (He died 20 years before the Pilgrims come to America.) We added contemporary Christian leaders, MLK, John XXIII, and secular figures, Sun Yat-sen (father of the Republic of China), and JFK, (whose symbol was a boot print in the moon dust). And of course, I had to have St. John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila.

At the rear of the worship area, was a 4'x8' sheet of plywood, a huge montage of colored photos from TIME and NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC – people from all over the world. Surrounded by our saints, we worshiped, in awe and wonder, between God and the people of the world. I still can't think of a better way to prepare for the day.

The first insight I had as I read the list of saints in Hebrews, was that being called a saint seems to depend on which side you are on. The Egyptian army which drowned probably didn't

consider the run-away slaves they were chasing to be saints. The citizens of Jericho had a different

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name for the invaders who breached the walls of their city. And given the chance, they would have stoned Rahab to death as a traitor.

We are given a wonderful list of those who accomplished great things in the name of God. Followed by a list of those who suffered greatly for their faith. These people are listed neither to elicit our praise nor our pity. We remember them because they gave us a dream, a hope.

Like Susan Boyle, everyone is a dream-maker. However, I was surprised when I finally read the last four lines of her iconic song: I had a dream my life would be So different from this hell I'm living So different now from what it seemed Now life has killed the dream I dreamed.

We built our dreams -- marvelous creations -- fascinating mixtures of hope and wish-dream -- about the way things would be, if only life were fair. We all have seen our dreams shattered, and scattered, at our feet.

And then, in grace, we were given a new dream, which is the reason we are here today. A dream far greater than any dream we could have even imagined ourselves, a dream that not even death can kill!

Our story began with what the evangelist, John, called the Word. The Word became flesh -- a man named Jesus -- and dwelt among us. Jesus dreamed The Dream, and he called The Dream, the kingdom of God. And The Dream entered human history.

But the religious and political leaders didn't want The Dream. They decided to take The Dreamer and his Dream out of human history. They killed Jesus. But guess what? The Dream would not stay dead! It is still alive!

This is the Dream we have been given. And it is always a gift! given by those saints about whom we just read, and by countless other saints, down to those who finally gave it to us. And now it is our Dream, a dream to which we are to give flesh and blood in our own lives and beings a dream which links us to all of creation.

In our story, The Dream was first articulated by the man Jesus, the Christ, the pioneer of the Dream. The goal of the Dream is the Christ of the cosmos, the perfecter, around whom all of creation will be as one.

Our story calls the completion of the dream the Second Coming. Teilhard called it the Omega point. Revelation calls it the holy city, the new Jerusalem, here on earth, where God's home is among mortals. God will dwell with them; they will be God's peoples, and God will be with them.

But what does the culmination of the Dream in some far-off future time have to do with us who live in the here and now? The answer is found in the fact that our present moment, our Here-and-Now, always lies between the No-longer and the Not-yet. Always!

There are a few people who dream of leading us back to the good ol' days, the thrilling days of yesteryear. But most people wander aimlessly along the edge of the abyss, as though history will move inexorably into the future, as though there were some ethereal plan dropped out of the sky. And if we can find it, and if we can decode it, then we will have a divine road map for us to follow.

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So the majority of humanity seeks to hold on to the No-longer. separated from nature, from other people, and from ourselves, because we are separated from God. For God is the one who makes all things new. People in all of these groups are God's people. God loves every one of them.

But in our lifetime, with the collapse of much of the cultural dimension of human society, it should be obvious that many of the old ways of being human no longer work, the old symbols have lost their power to give life, the traditional way of being moral often seems frightfully simplistic, And religion is often used to protect us from God more than to move us closer to God. All of that belongs to the No-longer! And between the No-longer and the Not-yet there is only the abyss!

And this is where the great divide in humanity lies, which has always divided father against son, and son against father, mother against daughter, and daughter against mother.

There are a few -- the People of God, who struggle to discern the signs of the times, who have heard the Word., who have seen the vision, who have dreamed the Dream, who understand that the only way to the Not-yet is across the terrifying abyss. But there is no bridge, only darkness, the unknown unknown

So, these dreamers, the People of God build the bridge toward the Not-yet, toward new ways of being human, toward the kingdom of God, here on earth. On behalf of God's People, the people of God build the bridge over the abyss, using only their own lives -- together.

And here is the good news! The builders seldom see the result of their labors. Like all the saints who went before us, who built the solid ground upon which we now stand; like Moses, who stood on Mt. Nebo and looked into the promised land, but could not enter it, we will enjoy but little of the fruit of our lives.

Those who dreamed before us lived and died for the Dream which will never die. They lived and they died, depending on us to complete their work, because, apart from us, they will not be made perfect.

Apart from us, they will not be made perfect. And we who received the eternal dream which we strive to live out each day, we will not be made perfect, apart from those to whom we give the dream, who walk out in faith, on the bridge we help to build,

And here is your question for this week. Years from now, what symbol would you like those in the future to use, to mark you as one of their saints?
Amen.