

Date: January 31, 2021 (Epiphany 4)

1. Texts: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Ps. 111; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28.
2. Subject: transformation and renewal.
3. Topic: human will in transformation.
4. Aim: encourage, challenge.
5. Proposition: "God renews, but we must choose to be renewed."

## GOD TRANSFORMS, WE CHOOSE

God makes all things new! What an incredible and powerful statement from the Collect for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany. God — *the God* — makes all things new.

That assertion isn't new. The New Testament is founded on the belief that God transforms. The Church grew up in the experience of renewal. We should expect God to make all things new. After all, in

the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep...Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light...God called the dome Sky...Let the earth put forth vegetation...

God made the first creation. It is only reasonable that he could make a new creation.

We are not surprised by the assertion that God makes all things new. But we can find some hope in it.

God used the Christ to achieve his re-creation.

Let's be clear that the Christ always existed, even before there was any physical creation. The Christ didn't come to be through the Holy Spirit and Mary of Nazareth. The Christ is God the Son and always was. That is simply how God is—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Or, if you prefer, Creator, Saviour and Spirit Guide. The Christ has always existed.

But the Christ entered time, space and human experience through the Holy Spirit and Mary of Nazareth. God entered our experience so that we might enter

his existence. God chose to become one with us so that we might rediscover our original creation. Because of the Christ we can be realigned with God's plans for creation. The collect put it this way, "...in Christ you make all things new."

It's not that everything is already made new. Rather, if anything is made new, it is through the Christ. It is at the point of transformation that our freewill enters the picture.

Our own individual and collective re-creation is only accomplished as the "poverty of our nature" is transformed "by the riches of [God's] grace." Human re-creation is effected by God's intervention.

But we must choose that re-creation. We must choose to be transformed. God does not force his transformation and renewal on us. We can only be transformed through the exercise of our freewill. We have to agree to the re-creation so that God's original image in us might be reborn.

As you and I make that choice—and carry through on its implementation—then the poverty of our natures is transformed and our lives renewed. In a magnificently divine consequence, our transformed lives become the opportunity for the proclamation of God's glory. God makes the proclamation of his own nature and character through our renewal. Our choice opens up the channel for God's own proclamation.

It all sounds great, doesn't it? Maybe even too good to be true? That's because the process of renewal is not without some wrinkles.

You see, the choice is not a one-time experience. You don't just choose one day and then check that choice off your "To Do" list. You make the choice of saving faith and then have to work out that choice day by day. We choose to be saved by the Christ and begin the process of our transformation. But daily we have to work out our own salvation—and sometimes that requires fear and trembling. "God makes all things new" but that is a process not a one-time instantaneous event. You and I are constantly in a process of renewal.

This complicates things. It is not always easy to reaffirm our choice to be transformed.

You see, God originally created us in his image. Humankind reflected God. We had reason, memory, will, intellect and personality. In every human being others can catch a glimpse of God's identity, intent and character. Our creation was originally intended to mirror God's justice, righteousness, compassion and love.

This is where human freewill comes in again.

In order for justice, righteousness, compassion and love to be real, humankind had to have the freedom to both embrace and reject them. They aren't real if we are compelled to do them. Well, humankind made the choice to deny the image of God in which we are created and so to reject his original plan for all of creation. That's why the Christ had to enter our time, space and experience.

God offers us the opportunity for our re-creation, but he doesn't override us as he makes that offer. So, we have to reaffirm our choice to be renewed on a constant basis. In essence, we ask ourselves, "What would Jesus do?" We come to an answer guided by scripture, reason and tradition. Then, we act, empowered and influenced by the Spirit in us.

Sometimes, there is not the energy to ask, "What would Jesus do?" On other occasions there is not enough time to ask. Still again, we act according to our less divine impulses. It's complicated.

But as we reaffirm our choice to be transformed, we retrain our habits and responses. It's parallel to an exercise program. At the beginning, exercising feels awkward and your body hurts. Over time, you train your body and the motions become more automatic. Like practicing the piano, eventually your muscles simply remember what to do and you no longer have to think about it. That's the way it is with the reaffirmation of our choice to be transformed. We practice and develop our spiritual muscles until our actions become automatic.

My advice is that you almost develop a spiritual training program.

First of all, select some area of your faith and its practice with which you have had problems. It may be a lack of charity towards others. Maybe you rely too heavily on your money for security. Perhaps there is a relationship that is still hurting you. This will require some honest self-reflection, and that may be uncomfortable. But reflect on who you are and on those sore points in your life.

Then, spend some time in prayer and study figuring out what Jesus would do if he were your life coach. In prayer, you reaffirm your choice to be transformed by God and continuously invite the Holy Spirit to effect the changes in your life. In study you explore what Jesus and the Christian faith have to say about the area you have chosen. Prayer and study then prepare you for the next encounter with that person or area with which you have problems.

Lastly, as you have your next encounter try to remember the catch phrase, “What would Jesus do?” After the encounter, review the outcomes.

So,

1. select,
2. pray and study, and
3. review what happened.

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It will take some intentionality and work, but I think such a spiritual training program will make the choice to reaffirm your transformation achievable.

God makes all things new! This is part of our good news. Part of this extraordinary hope is that we are privileged to cooperate with God in his renovation projects. God makes all things new! That includes us as we choose to share in his transformation and proclamation. To which we can only say, “Thanks be to God. Alleluia!”

AMEN.