

3 Pentecost Year C

9 June 2013

I may be wrong.

I may be completely off base.

But, I have to think that every one of us has at some point or another in our lives done something that we aren't very proud of.

Now, I'm not asking for any confessions here or anything, but I would like you to take a moment to think to yourself about something you've done that you really wish you hadn't done.

It probably doesn't take too long. If you're anything like me, it's all too easy to recall the things you're ashamed of. What's more difficult is forgetting those things. It's more difficult to accept the fact, that if you've asked for forgiveness, *even if the people you've hurt won't forgive you*, your God will. That is, even though God will "put away our sins", it's more difficult for *us* to erase the scoreboard.

But, once you remember the thing you're ashamed of, then imagine that everyone else knows about it. They may not know who you are or what you look like, but everyone in the county or the state or the nation has heard about what you've done and everywhere you go, you hear people talking about what you had done.

Well, that's sort of the situation that St Paul is describing to us today.

He's recalling and admitting to the dark period in his life when he persecuted the church. He's recalling and admitting the horrible things that he had done.

He's also telling us that everywhere he went, he heard people talking about the horrible things he'd done.

Everywhere he went, he was reminded of the person he used to be.

But here's the really amazing thing for us. Here's the difficult lesson for us to learn - and it has nothing to do with Paul.

You see, everywhere he went, it was Christians that reminded him of what he used to be.

But the Christians didn't stop there. The Christians reminded him of what he used to be, *but then* they immediately praised God for what Paul had become!

Paul, himself, became an example of the incredible work God can do - the incredible change that God can bring about in people.

Paul. A living example of God's love for God's creation.

A living example of God's ability to interact in one human being's life and that person becomes transformed by recognizing God as his God.

One of the classic words that are used to sum up our faith is just this - transformation.

This last week, an extraordinary person passed away - Amy Marsland.

She was - and hopefully, as you will see, she *still is* - quite an extraordinary person. One of the many reasons I say this is because she took a good deal of time to plan out her funeral. Moreover, she took a good deal of time and thought and prayer to prepare a letter to be read at her funeral.

There's no telling when she wrote it. I joked with some folks that since Amy's directions were that her letter should be read instead of any sermon, well, I got to wondering if maybe she'd heard enough of my sermons.

Be that as it may - and especially after having read her letter - I had no

problem whatsoever fulfilling her wish.

You see, she has something vitally important to tell us. She thought she was probably just writing the letter to those people who would have been gathered for her service, but it's a message that we all need to hear.

To begin with, she gave her letter at title - now imagine sitting down at a desk or computer and at the top of the document you put the title "Funeral Homily by the Deceased". I highly recommend the exercise to each of you. Take the time to sit in front of a page with that title.

Funeral Homily by the Deceased.

Then witness the words that come from your heart.

For her part, and important to our readings for today and our faith, Amy wrote this about her own path of transformation:

I have twice heard advice from a voice wiser than mine. The first time I had been insulted and shamed and I was very angry; lying in bed, I spoke my anger. And a voice from the ceiling said "Why do you have to be angry?" I was so furious still I sputtered and began to describe the offenses. And the voice came again, "Why do you have to be angry?" I at once fell asleep and in the morning I was at peace. Never before in my life had I thought or been told that I did not need to respond as people usually do to outside events. Now I knew I could choose my emotions. It was a great freedom.

The second time was at least twenty years later. After I had had my first heart attack, worrying about having another any time. The voice came out of the air. [It said,] "Don't worry about that. I'll take care of it." And I suppose that is what happened.

Amy also wrote that: I used to look for faith by looking up, without much success. Then I found if you want faith you have to dig for it, far down inside you where the truth lies: truth and faith, inseparable.

Amy finished her meditation on her funeral with some more amazing thoughts. I have to think she had in mind the fact that she had wanted to have Communion at her funeral when she wrote:

You will leave here today, I believe, happier than when you came in. Buoyant and confident in your own inner truth, saying "There, at least one other person saw what I saw, so it must be real. Something unchanging to guide my life by, and to come back to if I've temporarily lost it." Truth, justice, kindness, love are all real, and ultimately all shall be well.

Now, the changes in Amy's life were no where near as dramatic as the changes in Paul's life.

From all that I've heard about her, like most people, she was basically a good person from beginning to end. But, she herself reported awesome transformations in her life.

From the voice that helped her realize her freedom to choose her response to people, to her struggle and success at finding faith by digging deeper into herself, to finally finding something unchanging to guide her life by and to come back to if she'd temporarily lose it.

The transformation within her life was by no means as dramatic as Paul's. But, just like the Christians that glorified God by witnessing the changes in Paul, let us glorify God by witnessing the changes in our sister in Christ. Or, perhaps, let us glorify God even more by seeking to be changed like her.

Try writing your own funeral homily. Try it and see what God can do. Amen.