

**Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany - February 24, 2019**  
**Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40; 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50; Luke 6:27-38**

Our Epiphany season is drawing to its climax. Next Sunday tells the marvel of Christ's Transfiguration, both the turning point on his way to the Cross and also the divine revelation of this man, Jesus, who came once into our human history, into forgotten little Galilee, proclaiming and putting into effect the jubilee of the God of Israel: all debts are cancelled, everything is made clean and new. In our Epiphany season, this same Jesus Christ invades our contemporary Galilee and wins from us also that joyful faith, which welcomes him gladly. We are therefore no less blessed than those poor, hungry and sorrowing folk of old to whom he preached good news. We too are singled out and chosen by his call; we too are drafted into his service. We too become his own as he now comes to live his own life in us.

What life is this? How can we describe this life of Jesus? In today's gospel lesson, Jesus lays out the way of life of the children of God: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless them who curse you. See -- it's that very same jubilee policy of Jesus' uncalculating love: Lend, expecting nothing in return. Do not judge, neither condemn, rather give all away. As your debts have been cancelled, set others unconditionally free. As true children spread the reign of your heavenly Father, the one true God who needs nothing but rather gives everything.

But who of us actually lives this life of the reborn child of God?

We have the entire season of Lent forthcoming to ponder that searching question. But for these final moments of Epiphany I tell you something marvelous. Christ nevertheless lived in us, in you and me. Our text talks about *us* as the children of the heavenly Father, of course, but our Epiphany marvel has us put this very text *about us* into the gospel context of the whole Epiphany

message *about Jesus*. Then we comprehend the astonishing truth: the one true child of the heavenly Father is Jesus; it is he who loves enemies, does good to those who hate him, blesses those who curse him. Thus he is the true Son of the Most High, merciful even as his Father is merciful. And so it is first of all *for us*, as for those in helpless bondage to the endemic hostilities of this fallen world, that Jesus lived this life of love for enemies, to the bitter cross, from which he utters the most decisive prayer in human history: Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.

Who can live this way? Jesus. Jesus lived this way, not for his sake, but for our sake. Now -- just as surely as we grasp by faith this marvel surpassing all marvels, we who are not by nature children of that heavenly Father *become* true children by grace and adoption, in whom Jesus now lives his life of love.

*We are changed by this faith in Jesus; we become* the children of God, not by the paltry tokens of our own self-invented so-called good works, but by being made recipients of the one and only truly good work of Jesus Christ, when he comes into our lives with mercy to claim us as God's very own children. We are *changed* like Joseph's brothers in today's Old Testament lesson. At first they were dismayed to discover that the brother, whom in a sinful fit of jealousy they had long before sold into slavery, now stood before them, indeed with the power of life and death over them. Yet Joseph says: Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves. God used this evil you have done for the sake of great good, and as for me, I want only to provide for you too. So he kissed his brothers and restored fellowship. See: Joseph is a type of Christ, one who gives life and blessing to the very ones who had abused him.

Brothers and sisters, when Christ comes into our lives in this way, doing good to those who deserve no good, we are changed, remade children of his heavenly Father. Not with some kind of psycho-dramatic pyrotechnics. Rather we are changed by his presence in all its mind-boggling goodness; we are changed by this new company we keep. It is and remains true that, apart from this real presence of Christ in our midst, we are woefully far from the self-giving love of the children of God. But the Epiphany gospel bespeaks a mightier reality than even our faithlessness: Christ really comes into our lives and never again leaves us; we are not alone nor on our own any more, but belong to his heavenly Father. This *is* the new Reality; it changes everything, it changes even us.

Look at the change! From bondage to self, from false machismo, from lust for domination, in a word, from the old sinful self. From all that to the real presence and action of the risen Christ in us!

Yet no one in this life can stand up to our text as an a so-called “autonomous” individual, that is, apart from our gracious and saving Lord, and boast, “Hey, look at me; I have fully arrived; I am this child of God it describes.” As individuals, we are much more changed as in coming to the clear, sometimes even shattering perception of ingratitude and sloth, in coming to have no resort then but to flee to God’s holy mercy for those who have really hurt and done damage. Yet everyone whom Christ forgives he binds together with all his others, and thus makes out of us formerly isolated and desperate at war with one another beings a company of redeemed children of his own heavenly Father. So no longer taken individually apart and on our own, but taken now as we truly are, brothers and sisters united forever to Jesus Christ, we become his body in which he lives his own life of love even now on this very earth.

Look: it is as together that we feed the hungry and cloth the naked; together we are the living sign of a new and just peace between races, classes, sexes; together we lift up the plight of the poor and together we speak truth to power. Together we pray for our enemies and together we give with no expectation of return. Together, Christ our Head lives out his own life of love, even in us who as isolated individuals remain struggling, doubting sinners. Together in Christ we do live as true children of this heavenly Father.

Yet you might sigh still about your own self. You may reflect: “All these years I have followed Christ; still some same old failings trouble me. I am weary with my slow progress, episodes of faithlessness, and the coldness of my heart. I know that I shall bring nothing in my hands, but yearn to see the healing of these hands and the healing of others through these hands.” St Paul gets the final word of pure gospel to all today who hunger and thirst for that final healing, that transfiguration to the glorious liberty of the children of God: freedom from sin, freedom for love, freedom from self, freedom for others. To this yearning for the new creation, Paul says: Courage. Already begun in you, God’s Great Change is on the way! Sown perishable, we shall be raised imperishable; sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power. In the meantime: Courage. This life is not being but becoming, not peace but struggle, not rest but labor, ever becoming by daily death and resurrection that new born child of the Heavenly Father, till at last beholding God face to face, freed from sorrow, freed from sin, we shall never again turn away but rest in the unveiled glory of God’s love forever through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Next week on Transfiguration Sunday we get a glimpse of that glory.