

1st Sunday of Advent
November 27, 2011
Fr. Tom Elliott

Dealing with Change

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

Psalm 80

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

All of us hate change. As human beings, we find comfort and consolation in consistency and predictability. Change, which comes in a variety of forms and levels, is a disruption of our comfort. There are *negative* forms of change, such as death, sickness, loss of a job, loss of property, or divorce. There are also *positive* forms of change, which can also make us just as uncomfortable, anxious, or fearful, such as moving to a new house, changing careers, the birth of a child, a promotion at work or new wording for prayers at Mass based on the formal equivalence translation method.

Regardless of the types of changes that each of us are going thru right now individually, or the changes that we are going thru liturgically as a Church, it's important that we deal with them in a spiritually healthy way. Before we look at what that means, let's look briefly at some unhealthy ways to deal with change.

In the uncomfortableness of change, we are often tempted to—complain, gossip, blame others, cultivate anger and resentment, withdraw, isolate ourselves, put other people down, turn to false consolations and/or favorite sins, or be passive-aggressive. A much better approach to change is prayer; and more specifically, letting prayer lead us to understanding the *meaning* in the change we are enduring. In other words, through our daily conversations with God, we can slowly find meaning unfolding for the situations and difficulties that we are experiencing and that meaning changes our disposition; it can even bring us joy in the midst of very difficult situations. This is what the famous psychologist, Viktor Frankl, noticed while in a Nazi concentration camp.

Frankl observed that some of the prisoners reacted to the camp by withdrawing from others and sinking into a deep depression, often choosing not to eat or drink, and withering away. However, other prisoners were able to find meaning in what they were experiencing and Frankl observed that these prisoners were often joyful, even in the horrible conditions of the camp! These observations led him to write his famous book, Man's Search for Meaning, in which he explains the power of meaning.

The meaning that we find in the midst of our difficulties must be more than trite platitudes. It has to be more than “God can bring good things out of bad situations,” or “Maybe God wanted it this way,” or “It could have been worse.” No, the meaning that I'm talking about must come *from God* and *touch our hearts!* A beautiful example of this is found in our first reading today. The author of the book of Isaiah made sense out of the difficulties that the Israelites experienced by finding meaning in it; more specifically, in discovering a deeper understanding of the identity of the Israelites—“We are the clay and you [God] the potter: we are all the work of your hands” (Isaiah 64:7). The Israelites found strength and perseverance in reflecting on their identity as God's creation and how even the difficulties they endured were ways that God used to mold and shape them.

Let's look more specifically at how this approach to change can help us adapt to the new wording of the Mass. In an article written by Beth Dotson Brown, entitled, "The Roman Missal: The Challenges of Change," a priest is quoted, saying, "Our greatest challenge is to get inside [of the new prayers] and make them sound like *our* prayer and not just the missal's prayer." He continues, saying, "We need to spend time with the prayer ourselves, meditating on them and figuring out more deeply what they *mean*, imagining some context in our own lives that can make this prayer more authentic for us" (<http://old.usccb.org/romanmissal/article-5.shtml>, *emphasis mine*).

Isn't that beautiful! Rather than just sitting around complaining and grumbling about the new prayers, this priest is suggesting that we spend time with the prayers *in prayer*, savoring them and discovering deeper meaning through them. I suggest that in the upcoming weeks and months, we bring some of the new prayers to our personal prayer time and reflect on the *meaning* that God wants to draw out of them for us. To access these prayers for prayerful reflection, go to:

<http://old.usccb.org/romanmissal/samples-people.shtml>

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ What changes have you and/or your family gone thru recently? Where they "positive changes" or "negative changes"? Share with God the feelings that these changes stirred up in you and how you've dealt with them. What *meaning* might God see in these changes?