

Last Sunday of Epiphany

Mark 9:2-9

11 February 2018

Christ Church

Hall of Famer and former Washington Redskins star, Darrell Green had the dubious honor of carrying the Lombardi Trophy to the platform at last week's Super Bowl. For him the moment was bittersweet as he was forced to watch each one of the Philadelphia Eagles, Washington's biggest rival, kiss the trophy that he was carrying through the ecstatic crowd of players. It would be the equivalent of Matt Ryan carrying it through a crowd of jubilant Saints.

I admit to being more than a little surprised to see these grown men bending down one by one to kiss this shiny football, the symbol of their remarkable victory. Maybe I shouldn't have been. But, it did remind me of what we do in the Liturgy for Good Friday as one by one, those of us who elect to do so, process to the altar and kiss the cross upon which another, much more significant victory takes place. (But, I'm not sure the Eagles Fans would agree, at least not this week)

The image of these big guys in their football gear showing such outward signs of devotion stuck with me all week. And, when I read today's Gospel, the story of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain, the pieces of the puzzle began to make more sense. Please hear this – I am not equating winning the Super Bowl with Jesus' Transfiguration!

But, there is one common feature. In both scenarios, the players are in an altered state of consciousness. The elation of the moment takes them out of themselves. Takes them to a place of bliss and unfiltered rapture.

For the football players, this is a moment when all their drills, the sprinting, bear crawls, tackles, the endless repetition, the hard fought games, the bad calls, the lucky breaks come together into one

shiny moment in time. No wonder they are acting out of character – they are mentally, physically, and spiritually beside themselves. And they even have a symbol to show for it. One they can stand back and look at from time to time and say, “See what we did!” (Sigh.....)

When Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him to a high mountain, these three very human and very devoted followers are completely overwhelmed in the light and the bliss of Jesus’ encounter with the Divine. Their immediate response is to do something. One cannot contain such bliss or stand idle in its effect. And so they build containers in which to store the vision of three great deliverers: Moses, Elijah and Jesus. Maybe the booths give them something they can hold on to – a place where they can return and get recharged with this glory for the dull and lonely days when they likely to forget.

As we know, the vision goes away as quickly as it comes, and Jesus gathers them up and leads them back down the mountain, where the sick, the poor, the lost, the disappointed are waiting for a soothing hand and a healing touch. The Transfiguration is a gift to them, but it is not a gift they get to preserve, at least not in booths and monuments.

Yesterday, my friend, Rob, sent me a text to see how I was doing. As it happens, Rob reminded me that he is now living about a mile from where our family farm was in Richmond. I felt a pang as I pictured the location of his house, and the road that leads to our farm. I was surprised by the flood of memories of my beloved farm and the instantaneous grief that his text evoked.

Rob and I knew each other in high school. After graduation, he went to UVA and then on to the monastery. A few years ago, he left the monastic life and came back to Richmond. I shared with him how painful it was when we decided to sell the farm after my mother’s death. I said that it was on that farm, in the woodland, the fresh mown fields, the lush peonies, the daffodils nodding at the edge of

forest that I had found God. For me, the ground and all that it held was sacred. Had I been wealthy, I would have bought the land from my siblings and put it in a land trust. But, that was not to be. My siblings did not feel the same way that I did, which is okay. I had to move on and let go. Isn't that what we are always doing in this life? Just as we get the hang of one stage, it is time to move on to the next?

Rob, who had lived for thirty years at the beautiful monastery of Mepkin Abbey, replied, "I feel your loss. However, that God you found there meets you where you are. We just need to be there also. Mepkin was my place of that primal encounter. The reality remains in the inner room of my heart. Go there!!

The disciples make their way down the mountain. They carry that Divine moment in their hearts. It sustains them and it compels them to step out and embrace a life in God, a life in Christ. It is a life that will both save them and cause them to suffer. But, for them, it is the only life worth having.

In those brief moments when we feel God, we are reminded of a reality that is always present, even in, and maybe especially in, those moments when we cannot perceive God's activity. But, as my friend reminds me, the best access to the Divine is in the human heart – our core, our center – that place where love is rooted and grounded – and then shared, not coveted. It is in the sharing that love grows and expands. The disciples come down the mountain. We let go and move forward – in love – with love – as continue to make Christ our eternal home.