

The Twelfth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year B)

<i>First Reading</i>	Job 38:1, 8-11
<i>Response</i>	It is good to give thanks to the Lord
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalms 107:23-24, 25-26, 28-29, 30-31
<i>Second Reading</i>	2 Corinthians 5:14-17
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	“A great prophet has arisen among us!” “God has visited his people!”
<i>Gospel</i>	Mark 4:35-41

The twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time for year B continues our journey through the second letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians 5:14-17, and it's one of those passages in Paul where he is very explicit about one of the most interesting themes in Paul (for me, at least), and that's the theme of the new creation — the hope for a new creation and its implications for life in Christ. So let's see what he has to say. In 2 Corinthians 5:14, we read:

For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.¹

I'm so thankful for this passage, because one of the themes that I frequently emphasize to my students — some would perhaps say ad nauseam — is this theme of the old and the new creation in Paul. This idea of these two overlapping circles,

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

these two overlapping spheres of reality — the Jewish eschatological hope that one day this world (*ha-olam ha-zeh*, “this age”) would give way to the world to come, (*ha-olam ha-ba*, the new age, the new creation).

And these two overlapping spheres of the old creation and the new creation come together in Christ and that the revelation for St. Paul is that what the Jews were expecting to happen at the end of time — namely, the coming of the new creation — has already happened in the middle of time with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is the beginning of the new creation. He’s, so to speak, the new creation breaking into the midst of the old creation and breaking into our world.

And 2 Corinthians 5:14-17, the verses for today’s reading for the twelfth Sunday, really are where Paul is very explicit about that language of old creation and new creation. So he’ll frequently refer to the old creation as this world or this age. Sometimes he’ll refer to the new creation as the age to come or the time to come. But here in 2 Corinthians 5, he actually uses the language of creation itself — *ktisis* in Greek — of an old world and a new world that have been made by God, and the fact that whoever is “in Christ” is actually already a member of the new creation. You already belong to the new creation, and you yourself have already been made (according to Paul) a new creation in Christ.

So that’s the first point. It’s this idea that being in Christ for Paul really is in a sense living in two different worlds at the same time. Visibly, materially, you live in this world; you live in the old creation. But sacramentally through Baptism, theologically through faith, you live in the world to come. You’re a member of the new creation. You already share through the Holy Spirit in the life of the resurrection.

So with that kind of foundational worldview in mind — which we would all do well to ponder, because if this is Paul’s worldview as an apostle, it should probably be *our* worldview as well, right? This is how we look at our lives: do we think of our lives as lives in Christ, living in between two worlds? Or do we tend to think of ourselves and make our decisions as if this world were our home or our ultimate destiny? Those are very different ways of looking at reality; it’s a different worldview.

So if we take Paul's worldview and we kind of walk back through the verses for today's reading, a few things stand out. First, he says:

For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

So notice Paul's point here is that the implication of Jesus' death (which happens in the old creation) and His resurrection (which is the beginning of the new creation) is that we should no longer live for ourselves. What does he say? But we should live:

...for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Here Paul expresses an aspect of his theology of faith that we tend to forget. Paul is saying if Christ died and rose from the dead for you, then your whole life should be one act of thanksgiving to him. It should be a return exchange for the gift that He's given you. We should live not for ourselves but for Christ, because of the price He paid on the cross, but also because of the life that He now lives in His resurrected and glorified body ... which is our hope as well. So a beautiful expression of what you might call allegiance to Christ. Is He just your Messiah, the king, or is He the Lord of your life? Do you live for Him alone?

Second, Paul says, the fact of the resurrection, the fact that the old creation has passed away and we've died to that and now we live for Christ and in Christ, means that we no longer look at anyone from a human point of view.

What does that mean? Literally, what Paul says here is we no longer regard anyone according to *ho sarx*, "the flesh." Now that term, *ho sarx*, "the flesh," is another word that Paul will often use to refer to the old creation. So he doesn't mean the body. He's not saying there that we don't pay attention to someone's body. We're not looking at their body or understanding them as having a body or that the body is not significant. No, he uses the word *soma* when he talks about the body.

When he talks about the flesh, he will often mean this fallen world, which of course includes our bodies, which are sick and suffering and sinful and decaying and dying. But his point is that when we look at other people, the Christian worldview is not to regard them according to the flesh, not to look at them as purely members of this fallen world, not to look at them from an earthly point of view. In fact, he says:

...we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer.

Now I can't help but wonder if when Paul says "we" there, he means himself. Because remember, before Paul was converted, he was a persecutor of the Church. So he was looking at Jesus as a false prophet. Maybe he was looking at him as a Galilean carpenter, who had the audacity —the *hutzpah* — to claim He was the Messiah, to claim that He was the Son of God. The blasphemy!

And once Paul's eyes are open to the Holy Spirit, he no longer regards Christ according to the flesh, but he regards Christ according to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit illuminates his intellect and enables him to see the fact that the One whom he regarded as a false prophet and false Messiah is actually the divine Son made flesh. He's actually the one who:

...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:6-7)

... and then went to death on the cross. So his point is that if you have faith and you have been baptized, not only do you belong to the new creation, but you should regard your fellow human beings from the vantage point of a new creation — not judging them according to the flesh, but judging them according to the Spirit. And why is this the case? Again, verse 17:

Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation...

Notice he doesn't say he *will* be, one day, some day far off into the future. No, no no. He *is* a new creation, present tense:

...the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

And here we see Paul making a rather dramatic statement, that if you're in Christ, you're a new creation. Where would he get this from? How can he say that? I know lots of Christians, myself included, where you've been a Christian for a long time and things seem to kind of go along, day after day — doesn't seem all that extraordinary. How can he say I'm a new creation when I get sick, I'm still inclined to sin, I suffer, I'm going to die one day. What does he mean here? When did that happen? When do we become a new creation in Christ? How can he make such a dramatic claim?

Well, I'll just do a quick parallel here, if you turn to Romans 6. This is not in the reading for today, but just to remind us, for Paul, that transformation, that new creation takes place through faith in Baptism. That's how powerful Baptism is — it actually makes us into a new creation. You just can't see it. It's just not visible. It doesn't show through our bodies. Listen to what he says in chapter 6, verse 3 of Romans:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. (Romans 6:3-6)

I could keep going there, but notice what Paul says. Because Baptism is the power of Christ's cross and resurrection being applied to each individual person, when a person is baptized, they are literally — although not visibly — being crucified, put

to death. Their old self of the old creation is being put to death so that they might walk in the newness of the life of the new creation.

And I don't know about you, but that's a terrifying description to me of Baptism and of the demands of Baptism. What does our Baptism mean? It really means that we do not belong to this world anymore, and that we should not live as if we belong to this world anymore. *And* we should not look at others as if they were made for this world anymore, but regard them from the vantage point of the resurrection and the new creation in Christ, as future brothers and sisters in the eternal glory of the new creation.

So I just bring this up, because I think it's easy for us — especially if you're like me and you're a cradle Catholic who was baptized as an infant — to forget that Baptism lays upon us the obligation of really walking in a new life, of living life not according to this world but according to the new creation. This is why, by the way, in the early Church, for the first several centuries it was customary — even for devout Christian parents like St. Monica, the mother of Augustine — to delay Baptism until people were adults, because they regarded the obligations of the baptismal life as so grave and the violation of the baptismal vow as so severe that in a sense it was customary to wait until the person was an adult to actually take that burden of Baptism upon themselves.

And Christians like St. Monica, they would often consecrate their children. They'd have blessings of the children. They'd give holy salt to the children — almost kind of introductory rites of catechumens when they were children. But they were so worried that children would sin during their adolescent years or their young adulthood, that they would frequently delay Baptism until they were old enough to take seriously the demands of living life according to the new creation, according to this life.

Now eventually the Church saw the problems with that (pastoral and otherwise) of delaying Baptism. For over a millenia now, the custom has been to baptize infants. But at the same time, I think there's a real sense in which Paul, who remember is a missionary who's primarily evangelizing adults... pagan adults, bringing the Gentiles over into the new life in Christ. He's going to be very aware of just how

transformative the power of Baptism is, because the power of Baptism is nothing less than the power of the cross and the power of the resurrection. That's why he can say:

Therefore, if any one is in Christ [through Baptism], he is a new creation...
(2 Corinthians 5:17a)

So in closing, just two words from the living tradition here. The first is from St. Basil the Great — great eastern Church Father of the 4th century. He actually talks about the fact that there are three creations in Scripture. Listen to what he says:

We find three creations mentioned in the Scripture; the first, the education from nonexistence into existence; the second, the change from worse to better; and the third, the resurrection of the dead.²

That's from his *Letters*, number 8. So notice what Basil is saying here. The first creation is the creation of the universe out of nothing, the creation of the material and visible world — we see this described in Genesis. The second creation, he says, is the change from worse to better. This is what happens in the process of conversion and through the Sacrament of Baptism — where a person changes from their old life and begins living a truly new life in Christ.

And then third, the final change — or the final act of creation — is when God will bring that sacramental and invisible act of new creation (that takes place in Baptism) to its visible fulfillment with the resurrection of the dead, where those who are now in Christ mystically, invisibly, sacramentally through the Church, will be shown to be members of Christ visibly for all time in the glory of the resurrected body.

The implication of this — one last quote, this is from St. John Chrysostom, also 4th century Church Father — is that we really have to live differently. If you're baptized, whether as an adult, infant, adolescent, whatever it might be, we have to

² Basil the Great, *Letters* 8; in G. Bray, p. 249

live differently. We have to live according to the new creation. John Chrysostom says:

We ought to live for Christ not just because we belong to him, not just because he died for us and not just because he rose again on our behalf. We ought to live for him because we have been made into something different. We now have a new life. The old things which have passed away refer to our sins and impiety...³

Wow, beautiful point. We have been made into something different. This is one of those emphases from ancient Christianity that we would do well to retrieve. The idea that God's grace is so powerful that once we have received the grace of faith and the Sacrament of Baptism, we're not just members of the Church, members of a parish. We have become new creations in Christ, and that means we need to live differently and walk in the newness of life.

³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians* 11:4 (trans *NPNF1* 12:332)