

## Susan's ordination

My text this afternoon is a rather literal translation of the first verse of this afternoon's gospel reading "MAKE LARGE MY PSYCHE THE LORD." There is also a sub text "DO NOT REGARD YOUR SERVANT AS A WORTHLESS WOMAN."

Nevada Barr, our sister Episcopalian and noted mystery writer, has written a wonderful account of her becoming an Episcopalian. The book's title is "Seeking Enlightenment Hat by Hat." The title refers to her habit of putting on a flashy hat for Sunday services as a way of coping with a stressful season of her life.

The book begins with an honest, poignant and also funny first encounter with the Episcopal Church. She had recently been divorced and her "ex" had written saying he had made a terrible mistake. Please join him. She decided to give the marriage a second chance only to discover that before she could move he had found someone else! In a state of sadness and despair, walking on a snowy evening before Christmas, she approaches a gothic Episcopal Church. Since she did not believe in God, she knew the door to the church would be locked and that she would be left in the cold world of her godless thoughts. She touched the handle and the door opened and as she entered the sacred space she discovered three middle aged women sitting cross legged in the aisle of the church with a boom box blaring Taize chant. Within a few moments the women had brought out a large wooden cross and she touched the wood of the cross and placed into the wounded arms of Jesus their hopes, fears, sins and intercessions. Barr recounts that she simply touched a piece of wood but somehow felt lighter. These women simply would not let her go, calling to check on her, inviting her back to church, taking her to

lunch and within weeks she was having a conversation with her priest in which she explained that the creed made little sense to her and yet she had a strange longing to be confirmed! The words of the creed seemed foreign to this very new woman of faith, but the magnifying action of the three women made God's love in Jesus large and visible and vital to a seeking soul desperate for love, hope and purpose!

MAKE LARGE MY PSYCHE THE LORD. How is this possible? Is God not as large as God is going to be? When I reflect on this aspect of Mary's song, I think about a telescope. Jupiter is the size it is, but when looking through a telescope it is magnified-- it is visible and appears larger.

Mary prays that her soul would be the means of magnification. The word translated somewhat in a limited way as "soul" is psyche. It can mean soul or it can mean "butterfly!" Both meanings should inform our understanding. It is as if Mary says may that part of me, capable of transformation (like caterpillar to butterfly) magnify, make visible and bring into bold relief, the presence and actions of the Living God!

When Mary wrapped a babe in swaddling bands, placed him in an animal's feeding dish, she was magnifying the action of the living God who had joined his creation. When Mary did the priestly act of putting "the body of Christ" in that manger, as Sacrament of our encounter with God (as Schielebelex) shepherds and magi were able to adore the mystery of their redemption. Mary does this priestly action soulfully because she had been transformed. She changed from her cautious response to Gabriel "How can this be" to "be it unto me according to your word." We become magnifiers only when we have allowed The Holy Spirit to enable that transformation. Moses moved from incredulity over his tongue tied state to the ministry of liberator. The prophet Amos moved from

being a guy who picked bugs off of trees to being God's voice against a selfish culture filled with women who bought fancy shoes rather than care for the poor. Paul moved from being a murderer of the faithful to being the chief apostle to the Gentiles; Luther moved from fear of a thunderstorm to thundering against a church measuring out grace like a commodity to be purchased.

These transformations, prompted by the animating Spirit of God, changed people and made God's presence large, visible and transparent.

The sacrament that Mary put in the feeding dish, grow to be the transforming and magnifying agent of God's reign. Zachaeus was transformed from tax collector to gospeler. The woman with the flow of blood was transformed from polluter of the clean to a daughter and paradigm of faith. Mary, sister of Martha, sitting at the feet of Jesus was transformed from maid to rabbinical student. The women at the tomb were transformed from embalmers to apostles – sent ones—with a message of resurrection.

Mary's prayer speaks God's method. That part of us that is being transformed is the connection point and catalyst for the transformation not only of ourselves but also, our transformed lives become a sacrament and a picture of the possible for others. This is how three cross legged women transformed Nevada Barr!

Unfortunately the deep realities of sin, greed for power and forces that annihilate the soul work against the Holy Spirit's agenda. When courageous Florence Li Tim –Oi accepted her bishop's request and was ordained priest in 1944 for the purpose of getting the sacrament to Christians in Japanese occupied China, this courageous Saint of God was deformed by her church. Rather than being seen as a courageous magnifier of God's inbreaking reign, she was demeaned as a major problem which occupied the all male

Lambeth conference of 1948. She was forced to resign her cure, but she never resigned her Holy Orders. In the story which contains our subtext, Eli, a good man thought he was cleansing the temple of a drunken woman. The “Eli(s) at Lambeth 48 thought there were preserving the order of the church. Mother Florence must have prayed “Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman.”

I will never forget the moment in 1975 when I, as a newly ordained male priest, received the Eucharist from her hands. My brave Bishop Leighton, exercising his power to license a priest from another province of the Communion, (her orders had been affirmed when Hong Kong voted to ordain women in 1971) allowed her to celebrate at the Church of the Redeemer in Baltimore one year before women’s ordination became canonical in our church. The hands that received that Eucharist from mother Florence hands will touch Susan today and thus bring I think another stream of succession to this moment! I bet mother Florence must have hummed a few bars of a Chinese version of the wonderful Negro spiritual—“No man’s gonna hinder me!”—during her 27 years of exile from the gift and call God had bestowed.

The history of the church contains a legacy of deformation as well as a legacy of transformation. Priests both women and men, priests in the white vestments of their baptismal robes and presbyters both men and women help the transforming God in the power of the spirit to heal the deforming results of blindness and sin. That is our daily duty and our daily joy.

#### CHARGE

Susan: You have been a servant of the transforming power of Jesus Christ for many years. Through your work as a Stephen ministry leader, and a deacon, you are known in

this diocese especially among your soon to be brother priests, as a person of magnificent. John Stanley in a moment of prophetic clarity named you priest of this parish 6 months ago, Court Moore named you a priest, Sam Mc Clain was haunted for years with the knowledge that the deacon he had formed was meant to be God's priest! People who have fallen into the orbit of your ministry have experienced the largeness of God, the depth of God's compassion and the ever expanding width of Christ's embrace from the cross. Your soul has been in the vocation of magnifying God for decades. We display you today to the Holy Catholic Church as an icon of the magnifying and transforming power of a Spirit filled "Theotokas". Be a priestly bearer of God to a world starving for the transforming Bread of Life even Jesus Christ our Lord.

Be as transformed and as transforming as the midwives of the Exodus, Shiphrah and Puah, as Moses and Amos, as Mary and Paul, Luther and Florence. Know that you are in succession to them and to so many others. As the people of God were transformed by their magnetic magnificent, so may we be transformed by yours.

Proclaim with Isaiah the God who is as incapable of forgetting us as a nursing mother is incapable of forgetting the child at her breast.

Cry out in your priestly voice "Behold the lamb of God!"

Help us touch his cross so that we will feel lighter.

Feed us with his very life—may every Eucharist you celebrate be a trip to Bethlehem—a visit to the place which means 'house of bread...' Be Bethlehem's priest as Mary was when she presented the Body of Christ to shepherds and gentiles.

With a pipe organ or a boom box or whatever it takes call out our magnificent! Amen

