

Sunday 5. 2019

Have you noticed how cranky older people can be? I am speaking of course to those among you who are younger. You are the ones who notice the crankiness of older people. But I can also speak to those of you who are, like me, older. We too can recognize the fact that we are sometimes cranky about things. The difference is that we older people think we are justified in being cranky about this or that, while younger people don't think we are justified in our crankiness. They don't understand why we are cranky about this or that.

Why this difference? The difference is in our sensitivities. We who are older and those of you who are younger are sensitive about different things, and the reason for this difference is the change in the world in which we live. Things change. People change in what they are sensitive about. We see the example of that in the recent fracas in Virginia where the picture of the governor in black face surfaced in the public media. The picture was from the 1980s. By then white people knew—or should have known—that for a white person to appear in a picture with a black face was no longer acceptable. But if the picture had been of Al Jolson singing Mammy in the first talkie movie in 1929—correct me if my dates

are not exact—that would have been a different story. Our sensitivity with respect to whites portraying themselves as black was not yet there. What was alright in the twenties was no longer alright in the 80s.

The same principle applies to our religious lives as well. For instance, look at how our sensitivities have changed in our understanding of our piety. Up until Vatican II in the 1960s one section of the church was marked off by an altar rail. The area beyond the altar rail was called the sanctuary. Normally, only priests and altar boys were allowed within the sanctuary. The exception might have been the sisters from a nearby convent who could enter the sanctuary in order to dust and clean. The Blessed Sacrament was in a prominent place within the sanctuary, that is, in the tabernacle which was at the center of the altar in the center of the sanctuary. Women entered the sanctuary only once during their lives, when they married. Protestant churches, on the other hand, called the entire interior area of their churches the sanctuary. But we, because of our belief in the Lord Jesus' presence in the consecrated bread, named only the area closer to the tabernacle and the altar, the area within the altar rail, such.

Well, you might say, I am glad this change took place because it made women second-class and downplayed the fact that all members of the community belong to the church just as much as priests do. Yes, I think you are right there. But in removing the altar rails and putting the tabernacles in a different place, I think we may have lost a sense of the holiness of the consecrated bread. That is where my old crankiness comes in. How many of us even acknowledge the Lord's presence here in the upper church? And in our lower church, we hold talks in the Lannon chapel and we seat people with their backs to the tabernacle. No one, it seems, acknowledge the fact that the Blessed Sacrament is present. They sit with their backs to it. That's when I get cranky.

But today we have an example of a newer sensitivity. There is a meeting today at 11 AM to talk about how we can make our parish greener. To be sure, from page 1 of the Scriptures we Jews and Christians have been taught that our world, our earth, our planet, our universe, are God's creation and are therefore to be respected as holy. But today, because of our greater abilities to harm nature and therefore our greater responsibility to protect it, it is clear that we have to be made more aware of the holiness of nature. We need to see it as a sanctuary.

Let us take on this newer and most necessary sensitivity without losing our traditional one. Indeed, in the Eucharist do we not celebrate the Lord's taking bread, the stuff of nature, and making it his own reality. So the two can, indeed, do go together.

Simon Peter was awed by the great catch of fish and realized that he was in the presence of the holy one of God, this man in the boat with him. May we too see the Lord not only in the bread of the Eucharist but also in each other, and then also in the sun, the moon, and all the goodness of our natural world, and be moved to protect it, for it is holy.