

Homily – The Wisdom Cycle (Easter)

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In his blog “Called to Love” spiritual writer Anthony De Mello shares the following story about an unnamed wisdom teacher.

“There are three stages in one’s spiritual development,” said the Teacher. “The carnal, the spiritual and the divine.” “What is the carnal stage?” asked the eager students. “That’s the stage when trees are seen as trees and mountains as mountains.” “And the spiritual?” “That’s when one looks more deeply into things—then trees are no longer trees and mountains no longer mountains.” “And the divine?” “Ah, that’s Enlightenment,” said the Teacher with a chuckle, “when trees become trees again and mountains, mountains.”

Holy Week and Easter are all about this cycle. It is the cycle from order, to disorder, to reorder. In classical mythology this would be the cycle from journey, to fall, and finally the return to a new home. In philosophy this would be thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. In twelve-step programs this would be innocence, addiction, and recovery. The famous Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, has grouped the Psalms into psalms of orientation, psalms of disorientation, and psalms of reorientation. In Christian theology we often talk about the pattern of birth, sin, and rebirth, but there is an even more central Christian theme for the cycle of order, disorder, and reorder. And, that is life, death, and resurrection, or in the instance of our God who became man we have life, crucifixion, and resurrection. Last week on Palm Sunday we looked at the first two stages of this cycle, the movement from order to disorder, and today on Easter we look at the last stage, we move from disorder to reorder or from death to resurrection.

As we heard read by Dcn. Susan, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome find the tomb open. A young man in white tells them that Jesus is not there for he has been raised. And, in this version of the resurrection story from the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus has already departed and gone on to Galilee. The three women and the other disciples can find Jesus there where he will then commission them to go throughout the world sharing the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Disorder has shifted into reorder. Disorientation has spun into reorientation. Winter has cycled into Spring. Night has dawned into a new day.

Last week I focused on the shift from order to disorder. There will always be at least one situation in our lives that we cannot fix, control, explain, change or even understand. Normally a job, a fortune, or a reputation has to be lost, a house has to be flooded, an illness has to be endured. The wisdom pattern requires that some

kind of fall be programmed into the journey. It is normal that we still want some kind of order and reason, but part of the lesson of this time of disorder is that we are not in charge. Rather than willfully and forcefully moving ourselves back into the old ordered way of being, we must be open to the disorder. Be warned, however, that the ego and false-self will try to regain control. But unexpected weaknesses, failure, and humiliation force us to go where we would never go otherwise. We must stumble and be brought to our knees by reality. We must actually be out of the driver's seat for a while, or we will never learn how to give up control to the Real Guide. It is the necessary pattern of movement from order to disorder.

Unfortunately, the wisdom pattern never moves directly from order to reorder. There is no nonstop flight that does not go through the connecting hub of disorder. For meaningful spiritual growth this journey from order to disorder must first happen. It is not something just to be admired in Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Job, Mary Magdalene, or Jesus. Our role is to listen in our own lives, and to allow, and at least slightly to cooperate with this almost natural progression. We all come to wisdom at the major price of both our innocence and our control. Few of us go there willingly. Normally, it must be thrust upon us.

And, with our annual celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, Easter reminds us that death is not the end. Disorder does not have the final word. Winter turns into Spring. I'm not sure why God created the universe this way, but I have to trust the cycle that is shown to us by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Now, every religion in its own way talks about getting us to the reorder stage. Various systems would call it "enlightenment," "paradise," "nirvana," "heaven," "salvation," "springtime," or for the followers of Jesus, "resurrection." It is the life on the other side of death, the victory on the other side of failure, the joy on the other side of birthing pains. It is an insistence on going through—not under, over, or around. Again, there is no nonstop flight to reorder.

Spiritual writer, Richard Rohr tells us that the spiritual journey should not be too linear or transactional. It must be more mysterious, inner, dialogical, receptive, and pervasive. We can't project manage our way out of disorder. We can't use willpower to brute force our way out of disorder. That will just move us backwards into the old order. Instead, we must listen and act, rest and respond, and wait, until we are informed by deeper wisdom. A wisdom guide can be meaningful as one lets things percolate, simmer and gel. Reorder is available to all, but so many times one moves backwards into the old order or gets stuck. In these instances more time in the grave is needed before resurrection and new birth happen. And, here are some of the characteristics of this resurrection:

resilience in place of growth,
 collaboration in place of consumption,
 wisdom in place of progress,
 balance in place of addiction,
 moderation in place of excess,
 vision in place of convenience,
 accountability in place of disregard,
 self-giving love in place of self-centered fear.

With reorder separateness is replaced by wholeness. And in this wholeness, the greater the opposites we can hold together, the greater is our soul. Only the whole self is ever ready for the whole God, so reorder always involves moving beyond the dualistic mind toward a more spacious, contemplative knowing. The person who lives most of their life grounded within these characteristics of resurrection is the mystic, the prophet, the universal human, the saint, the whole one. These are the people who look out at the smaller picture with eyes as wide as saucers because they observe from the utterly big picture—with love.

Eugen Drewermann is a German theologian, peace activist, and former Catholic priest. He wrote the following. “Easter is whenever we encounter a human being in such a way that we feel absolutely certain of the infinity of that person’s worth and the eternity of his or her life.” Perhaps God has created this universal wisdom cycle so that we may grow into the infinity of our worth and the eternity of our lives.

Now once again today I want to give you some practical things that you can do to embrace the wisdom cycle of order, disorder, and reorder. This is from Richard Rohr’s Center for Action and Contemplation.

Start by thinking of the significant life changes you’ve experienced and how they’ve influenced you. These changes might include becoming a parent, losing a loved one, or embracing your sexual orientation. Take a moment to think of other changes: transformations to your physique, moving to a new home, stopping drinking, getting a promotion, leaving church, or meeting the love of your life. As you think of these changes the question to ponder is: What is your pattern of engaging with change? Is it something you welcome or something you try to avoid? From the changing of the seasons to the graying of our thinning hair, every day we have the opportunity to avoid and ignore change or to embrace it and all the possibilities it can bring. What kind of life changes seemed like death to you at the time but later brought about a new sense of life?

Here are three more reflection questions on how you react to change, particularly ideological change.

First, has your understanding and experience of God changed over the course of your life in ways that felt significant?

Second, if you're really honest with yourself, what is the next change that you need to make?

Finally, what needs to happen for you to "change your mind" and embrace this next needed change?

All of the great spiritual traditions recognize the wisdom cycle of order, disorder, and reorder, but as followers of Jesus we have a particular emphasis on this pattern that God has created into the universe. From before the beginning of time, God preordained the coming of Jesus into the world as a baby boy. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were not a fall back plan. Humans didn't screw things up so much that God had to move to a plan-B. If this last year of uncertainty, disorder and disillusionment has taught us anything, it is that change is a part of God's plan. But we don't have to navigate it alone. I invite you to follow the cycle that is shown to us by Jesus as we move from order to disorder and finally into reorder. Let go of control, and let Christ take you through the universe's essential resurrection pattern.