

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost – June 10, 2012**

Last weekend I had the privilege of retuning to my alma mater, the University of Notre Dame for my 25<sup>th</sup> Reunion. Since it was a big reunion, one of those milestone numbers, there was a great turnout by my former classmates. Nearly 300 of us came from all over the country – actually all over the world to relieve our youth and catch up on each others lives.

The problem was I didn't recognize a single one of them. You see, I went to college with a bunch of people in their late teens and early 20s, and all these people at my reunion were pushing 50. Some pushing it harder than others.

There was, however, one of my classmates who had not seemed to age a bit. Actually, one of my more famous classmates – Steve Beuerlein who had a 17-year career as a quarterback in the NFL. We all sort of snickered at his head, where not a single hair was missing or miss colored – an otherwise common theme among my 50 year old classmates. Steve actually had an opportunity to address the class, as one of our dinner venues was in the reception room of the press box of the football stadium.

Steve had heard the snickering about his impeccable and improbable hair and immediately brought it up in his remarks. He claimed that his perfect hair was 100% natural and that he just had good genes. He proceeded to compliment some people in our class for how well preserved they were and then poked some barbs at the rest of the pudgy, graying and balding men gathered in the room. Qualifying for two out of the three, I felt ever so slightly offended.

And then I get to come home to this passage from Corinthians that says, “Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.” I suppose I found that somewhat helpful, because it was really clear to me that our outer nature is wasting away – but it is not always so clear that our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

I suppose that is the challenge with faith – what ever we profess and whatever we follow is so much more directed toward our inner being – our core – our heart. It does not always have the outer signs and visible trappings of the things of this world. You can get a big raise at work and go buy a new car, so everyone can see. But if you have an amazing and sublime experience of God, it is not quite so easy for others to see, and sometime not so easy to share.

An wonderful thing about my reunion was just how often the conversations turned toward matter of faith and those wonderful internal things that make our humanity so connective. Certainly there were the conversations about jobs and families, but in the course of 25 years as an adult there are inevitable challenges that each of us will face. Collectively as class, we were invincible at age 22 when we graduated. Each of us has probably felt the perceived invincibility of youth at one time or another.

But as we said a special Mass just for our class and read the names of our classmates who had died – including two close friends of mine – the reality of our wasting outer nature was clear. As I talked with friends struggling to raise special needs children the challenges of life were clear. As I talked with others struggling with jobs in this flocculating economy it is was clear that what can be seen is temporary. And all of it begs the question “Where is God in this?”

One the great things I learned in college that has so shaped my core being is asking the question in every step in life, “where is God in this.” It may seem like a simple question but it is one that comes with a different answer every day – sometimes every hour. It is in many ways a starting question for a life of faith – simply training us to look for God.

We are good at looking for the obvious and outward signs of change in life. You can spot a new car even before the smell reaches your nose. An addition to a house, and new suit of clothes. But as Corinthians goes on today to say that what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

What can be seen is temporary and our outer nature is wasting away. This passage from Corinthians is drawing us into something more. It is drawing us away from those superficial conversations and into a deeper discussion of what our lives mean and what meaning we want from life. It is drawing us toward Jesus and what a relationship with Jesus means for each of us, and for all of us as a community. It is calling us toward some level of spiritual enrichment that will fill us in ways that we do not expect and cannot fully understand. It is really why we are here.

We are here to practice our faith – and quite frankly our faith is something that needs practice. There are certainly those moments in our lives where we can be so overwhelmed by the presence of God that there is no denying it, but there are those other times where we feel more lost and adrift. Unsure sometimes of God’s real presence and who Jesus is, let alone who Jesus is for

us. The thing is, being in relationship with Jesus, having a spiritual life of any kind takes practice.

Most of us are sensible enough to know that we just can't hop on a bike and ride 100 miles without any training. Most of us are clear that we can't just wake up tomorrow and run a marathon. It takes work. It takes perseverance. It takes motivation and it takes time for there to be a real transformation.

Why would we think that being in relationship with Jesus is any different? Why would we think that we can just walk into church one day and our lives will be completely turned around? Like anything that is life changing, like anything that is life giving it takes some effort on our part. And likely the more we put into it, the more we will get out of it. And actually, what seems to work with God is that the more we put into it, what we get out of it comes back to us tenfold a hundred fold or more.

What if we put half of the energy that we put into our external being – diets and exercise, clothes and make up – hair care products – into following Jesus – into being in relationship with God. And believe me, I not just pointing fingers but looking in the mirror. Again and again in my life, I have had to start over or start up some kind of new practice of faith. Whether it was reading the bible, praying mediating or whatever. A new training regime, a new practice of spiritual enrichment, always brings a new understanding of God and a new reunion of grace.

Part of that reunion – part of that practice – is coming to this table. Coming to this table again and again to move us ever so slightly toward Jesus. As we pray together, and recognize that Jesus is present and in us our inner nature is renewed. Maybe not in some cataclysmic seismic shift, but ever so slightly. Remember – your first training run does not make you a marathoner. But we are in this for the long haul. We are in this for life. We are in this for living fully into whom God is calling us to be.

And so my friends, our outer nature is wasting away. That is clear and sometimes painful. But our inner nature is being renewed day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. In this we can take hope. In this we can feel peace. In this we can meet God. But we need to work at it. Reunion does not come to us, we need to help create reunion with God. In prayer, in practice, in scripture and in service. What cannot be seen is eternal. What can be experienced is grace. What we have to do is practice.