

Transformation in Jesus, or, Why I became a Monastic in the First Place

In the November, 2010 issue of the *Clarion*, our local Diocesan newsletter, Bishop Jacobus wrote an article about the vision statement of The Episcopal Diocese of Fond du Lac which reads, "We are a community of disciples enthusiastically leading all people to transformation in Jesus."

He explained in the article what this statement meant. Basically, he said, as a community we need to be in relationship with one another. As disciples, we need to strengthen our relationship with Jesus, and in order to be 'leading' we need to be in relationship with those outside the church. And to what end is all this? Well, that comes under the "transformation in Jesus" part of the vision statement.

But what does 'transformation' mean? And how do we do it? I read further in the article looking for answers, but the article soon came to a close.

I was initially disappointed that the answer wasn't handed to me in a neat little package. Then I slowly began to realize that the answer doesn't come that way. How we go about transformation in Jesus is probably different for everyone, even though it leads to the same thing, which, for me, is complete unity with God. The fruit of the Holy Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23 would be quite evident; I would come to joyfully know, love and serve him in my own unique way, the way in which He made me - complete transformation! Well, OK, I have quite a ways to go, but I am gradually making progress.

With the end result in mind, how then can this transformation in Jesus happen?

The reason I chose to live a monastic life in the secular world is that I discovered I needed a specific type of structure in my life to help me in this transformation. I came to learn that I needed to build a daily life of prayer, reflective study, and service based on my baptismal vow in order to be able *to shed the things that kept Jesus from working these transformations in my life.*

Now, notice that I said that it was Jesus who works the transformation. It is not the tools and methods that I used that provide 'transformation.' The monastic tools and methods I use merely put me in the right position that let Jesus in to do his work. My prayers, reflection, and service help to strip away the veils covering my true self, the veils that are layered over my soul, preventing me from accepting his love and mercy.

When I am in prayer alone with God, there can be no dysfunctional ego. It is just Him and me, and He can see right through to my soul. There is no hiding. There must be honesty. This is the value of Jesus' instruction in Matthew 6:6, "Whenever you pray, go to your room, close your door, and pray to your Father in private." He understood the value of the monastic's cell - a place where all is bared before Our Creator. The monk's cell is the crock pot of transformation.

The same can be said for our reflective studies. We are examining ourselves, looking honestly into our souls, all alone with God at our side. We discover the things that are going well, and we reinforce them. We discover the things that need attention, and we work to improve ourselves as we move forward.

And the fruit of all this is our service - the offering we give to others of our unique skills, talents and interests, living the true life that God wants us to live.

The tools and methods of prayer, reflective study, and service help keep me on track. But what makes them even stronger is community. We need relationships with others, with Christ, and with the outside world. I formed the Community of the Gospel just for this purpose. I wanted to share the tools and methods that I use to open the doors for the transformation by Jesus in me. I wanted to build a network of like-minded people who would help each other fulfill these vows, and to provide some accountability to the process. To those who find value in this I invite to walk this journey together.

On occasion I am asked, "What if everyone left the Community of the Gospel? What would you do?" Answer: I would spend each day praying, reflecting on my life's journey, and serving others in ways that I can. For me, there is nothing else.

God's peace to all,

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