

CONFORMED OR TRANSFORMED?

15 Pentecost A

In 1944 a group of Catholic laymen came together in Majorca, Spain, to refine a technique of training pilgrimage leaders. One of those layman, Eduardo Bonin became the founder of Cursillos in Christianity. That training became what is best known today as *cursillo*, “short course” in Spanish, one of the most powerful renewal movements of the Church.

According to the National Cursillo Center in Dallas, Texas, the Cursillo Movement consists of proclaiming the “best news of the best reality: that God, in Christ, loves us. It tries to, and through God's grace manages to; enable the essential realities of the Christian to come to life in ... each person.” Christians “exercise their freedom by their conviction, strengthen their will with their decision, to (win) friendship in virtue of their constancy in both their personal and community life.” I never heard that when I went through cursillo. For me, cursillo simply meant that I could go to the source to find life, joy and self-acceptance through Jesus Christ. The National Cursillo Center may use different words from the apostle Paul but it does express the same intentionality of what St Paul is saying to us in our second lesson.

In short, the short course, “cursillo” is about being transformed. Within the first two verses of Romans 12, lies the most basic lesson of the Christian life. To be transformed into God’s likeness is to move forward in faith. As we move toward spiritual worship in daily life we see more progress when we are corporately involved. To be on the periphery of the Christian life is to leave unused the gifts God has given.

If I want to know how to keep my faith alive my eyes are drawn to the word of Romans 12:2 – “renewing.” If I want to know the will of God for my life the word that comes to me is “renewing.” If I want to make my life be good and acceptable to God I can not escape the word – “renewing.” The word renewing is a companion to being transformed. The two go hand in hand.

Renewing the mind is like seeing yourself in the mirror when you first wake up. It makes you feel tired just to look at a mirror after waking. After the preliminary wakeup cup of coffee, and a visit to the bathroom sink for a face lift - a new person appears. The whole process of waking up is pretty intentional especially if appointments are waiting. Cursillo calls for Christians to be intentional by the

courage of their conviction, the strength that comes through decision, and the stability of constant companionship with other Christians. There is work involved in that and the course of a life change will be anything but short.

Renewing the mind for Paul is necessary because we forget our focus. We get involved in the business of life. We want to fit in and work hard at conforming to what everyone else expects. To be renewed the mind requires a make over and a change from the thinking that is out there. Renewing the mind is like a restful time away from the track and field race to get my life back radically centered once again on what is life-giving.

The apostle does not want fellow Christians to be embroiled in the competition of what gifts and whose calling has primacy. So he makes an appeal that has the air of urgency. Previously he wrote that the gifts and call of God are irrevocable. God will not take back what Christ has won for them – they have the authority and the ability and their destiny is to fulfill those gifts. So he begs his fellow Christians to consider animal sacrifices known to all ancient religions. It's fairly obvious what he has in mind. He's thinking of the sacrifices in the Jewish Temple made to Yahweh. A sacrifice in the old system had to qualify – pure, unblemished, and dedicated for worship. That was an acceptable offering then. Now it is our turn to present what the Lord Jesus has made acceptable. He makes our lives acceptable by faith in His living sacrifice once offered. The Christian can now in turn do the unthinkable: present his own life as Jesus did. Spiritually, we are to follow in Jesus steps. Ours is not a calling to a blood sacrifice but one where we worship God through service and ministry. Paul compares that act of faith as being reasonable and acceptable.

While camping we saw several yellow and orange monarchs flying around the campsite. One landed near the picnic table and it was moving but obviously no longer strong enough to fly. Robyn picked it up and put it on the table so it would not get trampled or eaten. It lived for the rest of the day, died and then we boxed it in a clear container for a memento in the photo album. That monarch came a long way – probably from Mexico, starting off as a hairy caterpillar and building its nest. And from its womb of death came life and strength enough to bring it to Wisconsin. Its journey is truly amazing. It is a testament to the Christian life. What an offering of life it was given and how much beauty it offered to the world. Truly its presence transformed the world. It did not conform to it but

transformed it. Yet first the butterfly itself had to be transformed. How beautiful is its body! And God our Father, looks at our lives in that way and says, "How beautiful is the body of Christ."

A song sung at my ordination has reduced me to tears when I hear it again and again. "How beautiful!" Because of Jesus love we have been changed. We are being transformed each day into His image, His likeness. How beautiful! is the body of Christ.

Conformed or transformed are our choices in our Christian walk. We can go backward or forward in faith. Perhaps we can seem standing still. As we present our bodies to God, Paul tells us, we will know such transformation and renewal beyond our offering that one can not comprehend it. This is our worship. This is our life to live. God help us to honor Jesus sacrifice with our own and give Him our best. Amen.