

Lenten Reflections for EOHSJ

Fifth Sunday of Lent 2021

Reflection by Very Rev. Christopher H. Smith, KHS



THE PARADOX OF OPPOSITES

One of life's continuing mysteries is the paradox of opposites. The beauty of light is revealed as it breaks through darkness. Health is better appreciated after we have been ill. Goodness is valued more when we have faced the terrible consequences of evil. We recognize what order is after we have experienced chaos.

Christians believe in the profound paradox that life can come from death. In the Gospel Jesus says, *"Unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a seed. But if it dies, it will bear much fruit"* (John 12:24). The seed needs to lay lifeless in the earth in order to sprout. This paradox of nature is the image for what Jesus actually made possible. Through his death and resurrection, death was transformed into the fullness of life. Quite a paradox of opposites!

The journey from selfishness to selflessness is really about learning how to navigate the paradox of opposites in our lives in such a way that we become the selfless disciples Jesus calls us to be. It works like this. Looking at the opposites of silence and talking, we can choose to be quiet so our child can speak. Or the opposites of activity and inactivity, we can let go of what we want to do in order to participate in what a friend wants to do. We can quiet our laughter so that we can cry with someone who is in pain. Our own tears can give way to smiling with a friend who is celebrating a success. A smile over our personal good fortune can be replaced with a frown over the injustices of the world. Sleep can yield to keeping vigil with somebody who could use our company. Going to bed early can replace too many late nights that zap our energy for the next day. And on it goes.

We are the only ones who know what to give up or let go of in our lives so something new can be born. Each of us has our own particular set of opposites that we can turn into opportunities to bring life to others and to the world. If you wonder how this works, just remember Jesus' grain of wheat.

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