

July 8, 2018
Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary

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All Saints Parish, Syr., NY

I'd like to share a story with you about a young mother who was in a serious car accident with her husband and 2 yr.old daughter. They were hit by a drunk driver and her husband and daughter were killed. This young 27 yr.old wife and mother was 3 months pregnant. But in the midst of her deep despair and to her own amazement, she found a Presence within her that responded to her cries for help. Through her own personal experience of loss and, I might add, being a gifted writer, she shares how the darkness of her life began to lift, how in later years night slowly became day again. She makes it clear, "The taste of being blindsided by life, feeling disoriented, lost, and alone is part of the human journey!"

Her name is Paula D'Arcy and I feel compelled to share some poignant parts of a retreat I made with Paula a few weekends ago at Christ the King Retreat Center here in Syracuse. Some of you may have read her book, THE GIFT OF THE RED BIRD, but I'll be sharing from her most recent book, THE STARS AT NIGHT (darkness in her life finally unfolding as light).

In Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, we heard how Paul was given a thorn in the flesh and how he begged God 3 times to take it away but God did not take it away! Instead God said, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.**" In other words, God promised God would give Paul the strength to cope with his suffering. That grace, that was promised to Paul, is within each one of us - that generous, energizing movement of God within us! Paul is saying "when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong."

Talk about an amazing paradox! Paul's not talking about sports, business, or politics where being powerless is a sure recipe for failure. Paul's talking about our spiritual life. When we think we are strong and can manage on our own, not really! Look what happened to Peter when he denied Jesus. He thought he was strong only to discover too late that he was weak. We don't fall because we are weak, we fall because we think we are strong. So Paul turned his weakness into something positive. It kept him humble and forced him to seek God's help.

As I mentioned, Paula D'Arcy was 3 months pregnant at the time of her accident in 1975, but 6 months later she delivered a healthy baby girl.

Then she told us how forty-one years later she re-read her first published book, SONG FOR

SARA, which is a chronicle of the questions she asked of herself, life and God. She journeyed through what seemed to be unbearable but realized that something else was with her in that dark night and the grace and force of that Presence transcended her sorrow and sustained her life. Her future was shrouded in mystery, the dark seemed insurmountable. But the poet, Dorothy Walters offered the advice that she needed, **“First let your heart be broken open.”** In order to go deeper, the pain had to be met and experienced. Only when Paula touched the heart of the darkness did she see she had many choices – a number of ways to live her life. Instead of focusing on what had been taken away from her, she now saw how much she had been given and that only **gratitude** would free her. It was as if life had been waiting patiently for her to discover this. Margaret Craven in her book, I HEARD THE OWL CALL MY NAME, made Paula realize this was her moment – the moment **“just before dawn when day and night are locked in their tug-of-war...day begins slowly to push away the dark.”** Every life experience has the potential to help us grow!

Then, 27 years later on the exact date of her tragic accident, she was hiking in a State Park with some friends – fell, hit her head, and had a severe concussion. Her busy life came to a halt as author, retreat and spiritual director. She was to lie low literally for 3 months and it was during this time that she discovered by the grace of God, the determination, and courage, and light, never to slip back into the darkness.

Each of us in this church, either has or will walk by God's given grace the path of darkness and light. It's up to each of us, always, always, always to search for the light, to search for God's living Presence within. And like the apostle, Paul, in order to find the light we have to search for it and we can only do this if we respond to the invitation to the quiet in our lives. We need some quiet in our lives - uncovering the light takes time and attention. The apostle Paul knew this, it was through his search for the light – God's Presence within - that he discovered that in his weakness he became strong!

In these days when many feel oppressed and confused, we cannot allow the darkness to oppress the light. The darkness of racism and all the isms, the loss of a loved one, a diagnosis of a serious illness, a rejection and the list goes on. We need to surround ourselves by things that are life giving – those things that lift our spirit. For me its music, art, flowers, and a lot less TV. It helps to ask God to take us from the head to the heart. It's LOVE that calls us to the quiet by having a consistent prayer time and integrating that special time into our lives. It certainly isn't

ease to do in these busy times and it takes discipline to be faithful as best as we can.

I'd like to invite everyone to sit up straight, put your feet flat on the floor, close your eyes and put your hands on your lap with your palms up.

Take a deep breathe and listen to your heart speak to you (pause about 30 seconds), and perhaps when you leave church today you will be able to say to one another that we are walking around shining like the light. Amen.