

Sermon
Second Sunday in Lent

Eugenia Theresa Wilson
February 17, 2008
John 3:1-17

“How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”

I remember when I was a little girl, and I would, through no fault of my own, get into some kind of trouble with my two brothers. I would try my best to wiggle out of getting punished, but my mother always seemed to have been one step ahead of me.

After listening to my stuttering and stammering, trying to tell my side of the story, she would always ask me the same question, “Do you think that I was born this way?”

I would always say “Yes”, because it was very hard for me to visualize my mother, first of all, as being a little girl, yet alone, jumping rope, and playing hopscotch.

So I can identify with Nicodemus asking those questions.

Here’s something to think about, what if Jesus said “Yes” to Nicodemus’ question. How would the world be different today? Would you and I even exist in this world today?

Unfortunately, we cannot go backwards; we have to continually keep moving forward in order to survive in this world.

So what does it mean to be reborn, not only of water, but also of the spirit?

The dictionary definition of the word reborn is the following: born again, regenerated, and revived.

Well, I believe that it goes way back to our baptism. Listen to these words and see if they sound somewhat familiar to you.

“We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.”

Here’s another set of words that may sound familiar to you.

“Now sanctify this water, we pray you, by the power of your Holy Spirit, that those who here are cleansed from sin and born again may continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior.”

Do you recognize any of those words?

Those words, which are found in our prayer book, were taken from part of the prayer that the celebrant will pray in order to bless the water that will be used for a baptism.

After the person or persons have been baptized, the celebrant then prays a special prayer over that person. Included in that prayer are these words.

“...Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.”

This particular part of that prayer, to me, sounds as if the celebrant is praying that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the person who was just baptized will always keep that spirit of a young, innocent, child alive for many years to come.

Two years ago, when I became a novice to the Sisters of St. Gregory, I was asked whether I wanted to change my name. Since I did not have a middle name, I chose to add on a name.

The name I chose was St. Theresa of Lisieux.

Theresa was born in France in the year 1873. At the age of fifteen she entered the Carmelite Convent at Lisieux in Normandy where two of her sisters were already nuns. Poor health prevented her from following the full rigorous Rule of her Order. She died nine years later at the age of twenty-four, after suffering much from tuberculosis.

For her, Jesus' words “...unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven”, found in Matthew's gospel, spoke directly to her heart.

The reason why I chose St. Theresa was because she lived a very simple life. She didn't perform any miracles, nor did she have any great visions. What she did possess was an extraordinary love for God and desired to always have a childlike trust in God.

That meant recognizing her nothingness, and expecting everything from God, just as a little child expects everything from its father.

At the time of her death, Theresa promised to let fall from heaven an endless shower of roses to represent the prayers that she would be dedicating to us.

This is why she is commonly known as: St. Theresa, the Little Flower of the Child Jesus.

Over these past two years, St. Theresa has and is still teaching me how to recognize that without having a God in my life I have nothing.

She is also reminding me, every day, that all of the material things that I have in my life are just gifts that God has bestowed on me, to help me to live in this world, and that I own nothing.

So even though we may not be able to re-enter into our mother's womb, we can, during this season of Lent, begin to prepare our selves to be included in the celebration of our re-birth by the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on Easter morning.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus tells us that whenever we pray, we are to go into our room, shut the door, and pray to our Father, who is 'in secret.'

Sometimes, as children, when we did something wrong or got on our parent's last nerve, we often heard these words, "Go to your room, and think about whatever it was that we had done at that particular time!"

That sentence was usually followed by, "...and don't come out until, you are sorry and ready to apologize for whatever it was that we had done at that particular time!"

Well, during this season of Lent, the room that we are being asked to go to is not a physical room, but that special place that is found deep within our hearts.

During our baptism, a tiny lamp was placed in that special room, and the light from that lamp filled the entire room.

So today, I would like to ask you that fifty-four thousand-dollar question.

Just for today, how is that special place which is located deep within your heart?

Is it still bright and shiny inside or has time made it dark and dreary. Is that tiny little lamp buried under so much stuff, that you can't even find it? Are you tired of trying to find your way around in the dark? Are you so ashamed of the way that room looks that you keep the door closed all the time? Do you stop anyone from trying to enter into that room?

Do you wish that you could spruce up that room, so that it can become attractive and inviting again, but you don't know how or where to start?

Well, today is your lucky day! You've come to the right place, and boy do I have some fantastic news for you! Here's how you can get started!

During this season of Lent, I ask that you look deep within your heart to see if at any time, you failed to allow yourself to be guided by your Heavenly Father.

During this season of Lent, I ask that you look deep within your heart, to see if at any time, you failed to love your neighbor as your self.

During this season of Lent, I ask that you look deep within your heart, to see if at any time, you failed to respect the dignity of every human being that you may have encountered.

During this season of Lent, I ask that you look deep within your heart, to see if at any time, you failed to see the face of Christ in all persons that may have crossed your path, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely.

Through daily prayer and self-examination, during this season of Lent, and by daily meditation and confession of your sins against God and your neighbor, you will be able to add new life and vitality to that special room.

You will no longer dread being sent to that room. In fact, you may even find yourself volunteering to visit that room several times a day.

Finally, during this season of Lent, I ask that you keep deep within your heart, the reason for this season, "For God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son."

As little children, let us always remember to walk alongside of him. Never in front of him.