



*The
Rector's
Voice*



Trinity Parish in Bergen Point
141 Broadway
Bayonne, NJ 07002-2459
www.trinityparishbayonne.org



From: Father Jerry Pisani

The Paradox of the Cross brings true life.

As we moved closer to Holy Week at the end of the traditional forty days of Lent we began to see the confusion developing in the life of Jesus and those around him, even among those who hardly knew him or were not Jews. A Paradox is a word or statement that contradicts itself. The Cross, while the means of a cruel death in the time of Jesus, is a sign of life and hope to many, especially Christians. The paradox is in the contradictory stance of life and death, hope and despair. It is especially noted in that the day of Jesus' death is called Good Friday.

In much of the language of Scripture that leads us toward new life and redemption we hear phrases like; "take up your cross and follow me....", "whoever would save their life will lose it; but whoever loses their life for my sake will save it", "except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die it cannot bear any fruit". This is very confusing to many because it is stated in a paradoxical way. How does one find life by dying?

This is not unlike our current study and awareness of our Universe. As we look at the vast expanse of interstellar space we find a similar vision of paradox. While there are many wonderful suns, stars, and even whole galaxies being formed there are also many existing heavenly bodies that are dying in violent explosions and implosions. Recently we have discovered black holes. They seemed to be areas of extreme darkness that swallow up everything that enters into them to cause their final end. We may be seeing a process that may, in fact, be a source of re-creation? It reminds me of Scripture that with God darkness and light are both alike. The chaos of our Space may be the truth of the reality of life and the reality of God.

In my younger days my family were members of an Assembly of God church and there was a song that we often sang that when like this:

At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light
and the burden of my heart rolled away.
It was there by faith I received my sight
and now I am happy all the day.

In this song the paradox surrounding the cross comes to life for me. Let me translate this for you in my thinking after many years as a priest in the Episcopal Church. When I look at the cross now in the light of my growing understanding of space, I see the light as a vision of God at work in the creation. I wrote a paper earlier called $E=MC^2$ that can be found on the Trinity website under Articles. Not only is God envisioned as "light" but we are encouraged, as followers of Jesus, to let our "light" shine as well. When this creative energy is invited and allowed to empower our lives we begin to experience the re-creative activity of that eternal presence in us. As we experience new life the burden of the old begins to fade. With faith [Finding Authenticity In Today's Happenings] through the use of all our senses and

intelligence we are open to new truths and begin to vision new possibilities – we receive our sight. In this process the joy of God’s presence enables us to find peace and enjoyment.

We are also encouraged to be the “Gospel” in our world as we share our gifts and insights with others. The Gospel is often equated with “good news” that can come to us, as we remain open to this mystical source of the divine. To experience the fullness of this gospel in our lives we need to continuously remove the “bad stuff” that we accumulate. Without such removal in a conscientious way we can quickly clutter up ourselves and make it difficult to move forward and grow to our full potential. This process of taking in and letting go can be the song that enables us to whistle a happy tune. Seeing the light and allowing the burden of our heart to roll away is what I would call worship. Keeping in touch with God and walking with the people of God can help us to an abundant life.

There is another important paradox in walking the Christian life found in various portions of Scripture - give and it will be given unto you. Giving is vital if we are going to ever receive anything of value. We are told that Jesus said that he did not come to be served but to serve. This concept is the core value of what is necessary in order to acquire a life worth living. The concept of giving in order to receive is another universal paradox. Why should it be any more confusing than the cross – die to self in order to truly come alive or give in order to be included in receiving what we can never acquire on our own?

While there are many examples of these concepts, let me tell you briefly the story of Trinity Parish in Bayonne, NJ. I came here in 1974 to close this church because the large historic building had burned to the ground, very few members were left who attended services being held temporarily in another church, and there was not enough money to build much of anything new. We were, however, able to find a way to build a rather small church and hall with insurance money and gifts from people in our community. The Bishop finally agreed to allow us to try.

After about ten years we still were in the same place with a fair congregation. We tried to raise money in various ways to make ends meet and grow the parish. We had the basic tradition of good worship in the Episcopal tradition and we were doing our best to become enlightened through our Christian education programs. After some thought, we began to realize that there was something vital missing in our lives; we, unlike Christ, were not doing anything purposefully to bring wholeness and healing to people’s lives.

We embarked on a four week study to see how we were doing in the three basic areas of the church: worship, education, and mission. This was held in the summer of 1984. As I said earlier, we noted that we were doing rather well in worship and in education but discovered that our main mission was to raise money and not to change lives. It was during the final session of evaluation that one of our two disabled persons stood up and asked, “what about us”? After a decided period of silence we began to realize a real mission that was needed in our community.

As we began to move forward with this idea we were introduced to others in Bayonne who had a desire to serve this very special and needy adult population. It was amazing how quickly everything seemed to come together to promote and establish a solution. By January of 1985 we had begun a day program for nine identified persons and their families in town who wanted assistance in a work activity-training program. We began with three trained staff and about two thousand dollars. Within a few years it was incorporated as the Windmill Alliance, Inc. as a 501(c)3 charitable corporation established as a mission of Trinity Parish to serve our community.

We established a Supportive Living program a few years later for these adults when their parents or guardians became indigent or were deceased, and presently care for fifteen. In addition, noting that there were people who had other life issues and needs, we also established a program called

HIGHWAYS. With the leadership of three staff and about sixty volunteers from seven churches and two temples we make available clothing, furniture, food, counseling and other life skills to enable progress and wholeness. As I write this article in 2009, we have grown to a budget of about 1.8 million dollars annually with a full time staff of 35 trained people.

Now, instead of fundraising, we have “fun raising”. These are basically publicity events that bring in enough money to pay for the event but especially to gain the publicity necessary to make others aware of what we do, with the invitation to help us in any way that they can to continue these services. Over a period of twenty-four years we have learned the lesson that it is in giving that you receive. You begin to learn that it is easier to work smart rather than hard by following this universal principle that is also the lesson taught in our Scriptures.

Indeed, life is truly a gift. We did not do anything to gain entrance into this world and there is nothing that we can do to prevent us from one day leaving this world because life is a gift. When we begin to live in gratitude for this gift and realize that we can gain more in the joy of sharing than by a needless fear of getting we begin to have life and have it more abundantly. Life itself is somewhat of a paradox and the Cross is one of those contradictions that teaches us the truth we need to know. So many are caught up in practicing greed: get all you can, can all you get, and sit on the can. Greed is the exact opposite to life; greed often brings great despair but may even cause some to try to end their lives.

It is much better to learn to die to selfish notions and stop trying to obtain that which is clearly a gift. One of the best things we can do in this life is to find fullness of life by giving and sharing. In doing so we will become true followers of Christ Jesus. We can learn to use our gifts of time, talent, and treasure as a thank offering for all that we have received by gift from God. When we experience the paradox of giving in order to receive we come to know the completeness of a life filled with giving and receiving.

I close with a Creedal Statement from our brothers and sisters in our church in New Zealand:

You, O God, are supreme and holy.
You create our world and give us life.
Your purpose overarches everything we do.
You have always been with us.
You are God.

You, O God, are infinitely generous,
good beyond all measure.
You came to us before we came to you.
You have revealed and proved
your love for us in Jesus Christ,
who lived and died and rose again.
You are with us now.
You are God.

You, O God, are Holy Spirit.
You empower us to be your gospel in the world.
You reconciled and heal; you overcome death.

You are our God. We worship you.