

Homily – May 18th, 2025 – 5th Sunday of Easter

During my almost 28 years of being a priest, although it's rare, this has happened to me more than once. Other people, who are not priests, have told me that they have had almost identical experiences. It has to do with visiting people—either in their homes or in the hospital—who are very close to death. While still conscious



and able to mumble a few words, they would, apparently see right through me and talk to a person behind me. I knew there was nobody behind me or, at least, that's what my eyes were telling

me. Sometimes they would point to an open door that was behind me when, again, my eyes only saw a solid wall. Some of this could be attributed to the morphine or other medication they were being sedated with. Yet, I couldn't say that was the case always. It seemed these people actually were half in this world and half in the next world. The veil between this world and the next parted, and they got a glimpse of something wonderful, a glimpse of the eternal. With that glimpse, everything else faded away, including me and the four walls of the room.

In the world of psychology, there is something called "baseline consciousness." 99.99% of the time, we function in baseline consciousness. If you're listening to me now, you are in baseline consciousness. If you're not listening to me, have a good sleep! You're in baseline consciousness when you get out of bed in the morning, when you dress yourself, when you drive your car, when you do grocery

shopping, when you prepare meals, when you log onto your computer, etc. It's ordinary consciousness; without it we couldn't get by in life. However, on rare occasions the veil parts and in that moment our consciousness is highly illumined. And because it is highly illumined, it includes more of reality.

It's very hard in baseline consciousness to evaluate an experience, either yours or someone else's, that comes from an altered state of consciousness. When someone, close to death, tells me that they see a doorway behind me with warm, welcoming light, or that they see their long-lost relatives or Jesus himself in that door way, I've learned to reserve judgment and just honour their experience. They are not nuts. They are in a heightened state of consciousness, taking in more of reality. And I'm trying to evaluate this from a level of baseline consciousness that wonders why the Blue Jays aren't winning more games than they are. At that moment I just have to stop evaluating and just honour what's right in front of me. Obviously, it's bigger than my little mind can comprehend.

You who are parents, especially when you held your newborn baby in your arms for the first time, know what an altered state of consciousness is. Babies, by the way, are the only ones who will let us look into their eyes endlessly and never look away. They'll never say, "That's inappropriate," or "you're crowding my space." If you don't have a baby who will allow you to stare into their eyes and their soul, I suggest meditation. If you don't have a baby, and you can't sit still long enough to meditate, try psychedelic drugs!

So, it might be the birth of a baby, or the time you fell in love, or when you stood at the foot of the Grand Canyon in awe, in that moment your consciousness was illumined and expanded. The goal in the spiritual life is not just to have these wonderful, fleeting moments, and then we go back to washing the dishes. The goal is to turn those rare moments into steady and regular ways of seeing. Nobody's consciousness was illumined and enlightened as much as Jesus' consciousness. He saw, in a steady and regular way, the Kingdom of God. He saw past our agendas, past our greed, past our manmade rules and regulations—much like dying people in hospital beds see past me—and he saw the Kingdom of God. His only desire was to bring us, kicking and screaming, into that Kingdom.

St. Paul, the Church's greatest missionary, made three long and important missionary journeys during his lifetime. These journeys always started and ended in Antioch, his homebase. In today's first reading, Paul has left Antioch and has gone to all those places we heard (Lystra, Iconium, Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga, and Attalia) in order to tell people about this Jesus and the Kingdom of God. We heard that he suffered many persecutions on account of his desire to share his faith. He survived stoning, being run out of synagogues and towns, and imprisonment. Yet when he returned back to homebase, to Antioch, he doesn't speak about his suffering at all. Instead, it says that Paul called the Church together and related all that God had done for him.

Paul's move from ordinary consciousness to an altered state of consciousness didn't happen in a one-time, powerful conversion experience. It is true Paul did have a powerful conversion experience on the road to Damascus. What he saw in

that fleeting moment, the Kingdom of God, was the beginning of a regular, steady way of seeing. Once you see it, you can't unsee it. In fact, you want to see it more. You don't care that no one understands you; all you want to do is to share that vision with others.

John, in that second reading from the Book of Revelation, says, ***"I saw a new heaven and a new earth; the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more."*** It's like John was half in this world and half in the next. It was a mystical vision, a vision of the Kingdom of God, a vision of how things ought to be. The sea was no more. What is the sea associated with? Chaos. If the sea is no more, the chaos of life is no more. Isn't that a worthwhile prayer for us to pray, that in the chaos of our personal lives and the chaos that the world is experiencing we would be able to see a new heaven and a new earth emerging in the middle of it all.

When a breakthrough in human consciousness happens, and I feel we are on the cusp of a huge breakthrough in the Church, it's a wonderfully energizing thing. It galvanizes people into ways of being alive. According to the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:4), Peter and John were thrown into prison for preaching about Jesus. The result was not the end of the Church—just the opposite. Peter and John's preaching changed the consciousness of people to such an extent that 5,000 people joined the Church in just one day. Talk about a joy that galvanizes people. Unfortunately, by the 4th century, when Christianity was no longer persecuted but gained lots of privileges by now being the official religion of the Roman Empire,

we moved from a mystical church to a church of laws and rules, the very thing Jesus was against.

For the most part, we tend to read these Scripture texts from a legalistic point of view in order to bolster church order and keep people in the world of pay, pray, and obey. The late Pope Francis was nothing like that. He used the Scriptures to help people connect with God, to bring peoples' consciousness into a new realm. He was pushing for a new theology that would guide the Church of today. Pope Francis heard the voice of the one on the throne in Revelation, the voice that said, "See, I am making all things new."

Don't be afraid of change. God is bringing us into a new consciousness. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Once you see it, you can't unsee it.

~Fr. Phil