

THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION: PALM SUNDAY April 5, 2009 B

I want to acknowledge the story told by Fulton Oursler (Behold This Dreamer, Boston: Little, Brown, 1964) as told by The Rev. Dr. John H. Westerhoff in Grateful and Generous Hearts.

Fulton Oursler, best known perhaps as the author of the book, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, tells in another one of his works the story of Anna - the woman who raised him as a child. He recalls sitting in the kitchen one day when he heard her say, "Much obliged, dear Lord, for my vittles." "What's a vittle?" he asked. "It's whatever I've got to eat and drink," she responded. "But you'd get your vittles whether you thanked God or not!" he continued. "Sure," she said, "but it makes everything taste better to be thankful. You know, it's a game an old preacher taught me to play. It's about looking for things to be thankful for. Like one day I was walking to the store to buy a loaf of bread. I look in all the windows. There are so many pretty clothes." "But Anna, you can't afford to buy any of them!" he interjected. "Oh, I know, but I can play dolls with them. I can imagine your mom and sister all dressed up in them and I'm thankful. Much obliged, dear Lord, for playing in an old lady's mind." Then, she continued, "one day, I got caught in the rain. I had heard about people taking showers and I've seen the one you use, and I thought, now I have one too. You know, God is just giving away heaven every day. Much obliged, dear Lord."

Oursler ends his story with these words: "The soul of long-dead Anna was a big soul, big enough to see God everywhere, and she taught me a great deal about life; for I will never forget when word came to me from the dingy street where she lived that Anna was dying. I remember driving in a cab and standing by her bedside; she was in such deep pain and her hands were knotted together in a desperate clutch. Poor old woman, what had she to be thankful for now? She opened her eyes and looked at me. 'Much obliged, dear Lord, for such fine friends.' She never spoke again except in my heart, but she speaks to me every day there, and I'm much obliged, dear Lord, for that."

This story of Anna is a good example of what it is to be profoundly grateful for the gift of life God has given us. And there's no week in the entire year when we, as a church community, are more consciously aware of God's gift of life to us than Holy Week.

We come into this world with this gift of life and nothing more. And we return this gift to God when we leave this world. From birth until death, who we are and all we have is God's gift of life to us. God so loves us that God's own life became flesh in Jesus so that we might have life and experience it in its fullness. Holy Week provides us each year with an opportunity to contemplate the

mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ in ways we perhaps take for granted in our every day living. It is the greatest story ever told, but it's not just about the life of Jesus who died a violent death on a cross so long ago. It's about the mystery of the Christ who lives and suffers and dies in our humanity today.

It's a mystery found within us, capable of renewing our hearts. And that's what the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection can do for us this grace-filled season of rebirth we celebrate each spring.

And so, I encourage you to take some special time this week to pay attention to where the transforming power of God's grace and love is calling you to new life this Easter.

Much obliged are we, dear Lord, for your sacrificial love given to us for the life of our world.

Amen.

*Bob Hudak
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