

Ps 8; Eccl 3:1-11; Rev 21:1-6a; Mt 25:31-46

God Is Making All Things New

01-01-17 – Covenant Renewal-Holy Communion

On Christmas Day, we looked at what the birth of the Word made flesh means in our lives as we begin a new year – and today 2017 is launched. As to 2016 – good riddance. As to 2017 – Happy New Year! We move forward, our hope in God's grace, and our growing love of Jesus.

In 1717, 300 years ago, a vagabond in England, exhausted and famished ...

... came to a roadside Inn with a sign reading:

"George and the Dragon." He knocked.

The Innkeeper's wife stuck her head out a window. "Could ye spare some victuals?" He asked.

The woman glanced at his shabby, dirty clothes.

"No!" she shouted.

"Could I have a pint of ale?"

"No!" she shouted.

"Could I at least sleep in your stable?"

"No!" she shouted again.

The vagabond said, "Might I please...?"

"What now?" the woman screeched, not allowing him to finish.

"D'ye suppose," he asked, "that I might have a word with George?" (emmitsburg.net)

We who follow Jesus have the joy and the vision of Jesus Christ. By the Word of God, we have spiritual understanding – the wisdom from above (Ja 3:17) – the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul taught the church at Corinth the difference between the spiritual and the natural understanding:

The unspiritual self, just as it is by nature, can't receive the gifts of God's Spirit. There's no capacity for them. They seem like so much silliness. Spirit can be known only by spirit—God's Spirit and our spirits in open communion. Spiritually alive, we have access to everything God's Spirit is doing, and can't be judged by unspiritual critics. Isaiah's question, 'Is there anyone around who knows God's Spirit, anyone who knows what he is doing?' has been answered: Christ knows, and we have Christ's mind." (1 Cor 2:14-16 MSG)

Out of the Wisdom Literature of the Bible comes this great, familiar passage – like the song, *Turn, Turn, Turn*. To everything there is a season. We face an unknown New Year not in our own confidence. We depend upon the power of our sovereign God. A rainbow in a stormy sky is the sign of God’s solemn promise that a world-wide flood will not wipe out life as we know it. And, God promised: “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” (Gen 8:22)

The “mind of Christ” is a real gift. We do not inherit it – or learn it academically – we receive this spiritual discernment from the Spirit – the Holy Spirit. As you and I put our faith in God’s covenants, so we also keep His commandments – His moral law that was given on Mt. Sinai. Over time, we prove to be dependable servants, His children – so He shows up more and more – or we become attuned to what He is doing around us more and more. You decide which it is. As we live by His Word – so His Word is alive in us. And this is the reality of covenant life. If it isn’t joyful, it isn’t covenant living – obedient living is

delicious, not distasteful. With God's help, it is possible. He makes all things new.

St. Augustine's life story is a great example of the working of the Lord making all things new. His famous auto-biography, *Confessions*, should be subtitled, "If I can do it, anyone can." Augustine was born in the 50s of the 4th century AD in Thagaste, a city in what is now Algeria, North Africa. His father, Patricius, was a Pagan who accepted Christ on his death bed. Better late than never, right? But, the most important person in Augustine's life was surely his mother, Monica. She was a devout Christian. It is said she never stopped praying for her wayward son, Augustine, nor for her beloved Pagan husband.

Augustine went away to school first in Madaurus and then in Carthage. In the big city, Augustine left the church and became a follower of a gnostic sect called the Manichaean religion. It is a dualistic moral teaching that basically distorts the truth about God. Our hero fell in with a rough crowd of men. He also moved in with a mistress and they had a son, Adeodatus. Monica was deeply concerned, and continued to pray for

her son. In his memoir, *Confessions*, he admits that in those days he did pray. He prayed, "Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet."

Augustine's brilliant career in rhetoric landed him in Milan, Italy. There, by the influence of his mother's faith, and a Christian friend (Simplicianus), he began go to church. So, under the ministry of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, he was converted and began preparing for the priesthood. He left his mistress and called off the marriage to a girl of high station and wealth. So, Augustine embarked upon a lifetime of devotion and service to Jesus Christ. He became a great defender of the faith.

I am not suggesting everybody should enter the church as a full-time servant of God. Augustine's story is a picture of how God works to make all things new. In Christ, Augustine and you and I become a new creation. Old things pass away – like the old year – like an old garment laid aside for the new – like 2017 – ready to put on and begin afresh.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ – the final book of the Bible, shows the current state of affairs in heaven and on earth. “The holy city, the New Jerusalem is coming down out of heaven from God.” Jesus in the flesh is upon His throne. He proclaims in a loud voice, “See, I am making all things new.”

Christ alone has the power to recreate and set to rights all that we are. Your resolutions, at New Year or any time will not succeed without the power of Jesus in your life. When first things have passed away, our world will receive her King. **He** is the beginning and the end. And you are made new in His presence. Happy New Year.