

## Church of the Holy Spirit

### Deacon Wadas Homily

January 21/22, 2012

It was for 70 plus years that Christians in the Soviet Union suffered persecution. Thousands of churches were closed, controlled or converted to other than religious uses. Then suddenly change transformed the spiritual climate of the Marxist country almost faster than the news media could cover it. I remember an article in the USA Today that reported that the Russian Orthodox Church has requested 20 million Bibles for the Soviet Union's 60 – 100 million Christians. A study had been authorized to develop a value system to replace the ousted god of Marxism. The basis of the study was to be the 10 Commandments.

The atheist Madalyn O'Hare who promoted the removal of prayer from schools in the U.S. was at a Moscow book fair trying to sell her book at the time and she was by passed as multitudes lined up for Christian and Jewish literature. Change is wonderful! Especially when it happens to someone else.

What about change that might affect us?

Fact: One-fourth of the children in the United States live below the poverty level. What economic or educational changes would we be willing to undergo to alter that tragic figure?

Fact: Racial discrimination still lingers in the workplace and in our neighborhoods. What deep seated attitudes are we willing to acknowledge and discard in order to be a part of the solution to this ancient social ailment?

Yes, change is wonderful, but it is more difficult when we need to change.

All three of today's readings seem to shout, "**CHANGE!**"

Unfortunately, the large fish associated with Jonah has become the star of the account. We focus on it and fail to see Jonah's resistance to changing his prejudice. He knows the Ninevites are sinners. He believes they are unworthy of God's message and mercy. His mind is made up. He doesn't want to be a part of change.

Paul calls for change now because the world is changing rapidly. Any reliance on what is not of God is to be changed. Security is to rest solely with God.

In the Gospel Jesus appears in Galilee shortly after John is arrested. At this sad time in His life He preaches change. People are to change their lives and believe in the Good News. Some changes are dramatic. He even calls some to change their life work to follow Him.

**Change! Change! Change!** It echoes through the Scriptures.

And yet change is not a simple process.

- Change is challenging. It requires a new look at old issues.
- Change is exhausting. Effort is demanded to weed out old habits and plant new ones.
- Change is threatening. There are those who will oppose us in our attempts to change.

- Change is painful. Change may mean leaving behind ideas, behaviors, and maybe even people who have been close to us for a long time.
- Change is humiliating. In order to change we will have to sacrifice comfortable old ideas.

Despite all these seemingly negative aspects, change is the way of reform to which Jesus points us if we are to believe the Good News. Change has many positive qualities that outweigh the negative.

- Change stimulates us to become the individuals God has created us to be. Change is no companion to complacency.
- While change requires much effort, the continued exercising of the process of change will build up our endurance.
- Growth implies pain. As in any physical exercise, we experience some pain as we stretch and reach for new goals in our spiritual lives.
- While change is humiliating, we come to realize that humility is essential to the Christian life.

Where life exists, change is inevitable. So make a friend of it!

- a) Most change is seen as a loss. If we stop to be concerned about what we have given up and concentrate on what is being added to our life, we are well on the way to a deeper faith in the Good News.
- b) Change becomes a friend that accompanies us on our daily journey, a journey that brings us closer to God.
- c) Change is not to be sought for its own sake, but for leading us to believe the Gospel.

In a few moments we will say our “Amen” to an amazing change --- that of the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus. Our “Amen” acknowledges our willingness to allow the transforming Spirit of Jesus to enter into our lives and reform them, in other words to change us.