

Funeral Homily for Martin Landis / 6 Aug 2019 (The Feast of the Transfiguration)

- Among the Psalms there is a verse that *always* stands out to me on occasions like this: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his servants.”¹ Psalm 116 goes on to say this: “O Lord, I am your servant; ... and...you have freed me from my bonds.” So very often, the death of one of God’s servants brings grief and sorrow to us. *Yet*, the Psalmist declares that the death of our loved one is *precious* to the Lord. *How could this be?* Because, *at death*, God frees us from the many bonds that still seem to cling to us, which hold us back from experiencing the fullness of his love and glory.
- Here is a *paradox*: Martin, after death, is *not closer* to the Lord than he was before ~ *even though* he, *himself*, may now *feel* closer. This is at least in part because *he* now *sees* the Lord in a way that *we* do not. Yet, *after Baptism*, God *is in us*, and we are *in him* ~ *always*. And then, *at death*, *this bud of truth comes to full flower*. For, *through death*, our departed loved ones *come to experience* the Lord’s nearness in an especially profound way... and, in a way they have never *really glimpsed* before. We can *imagine* their joy at this moment. *Suddenly*, they are overcome by that same sense of *startling nearness*, which our ancestor Jacob had, upon waking from his famous dream. “*Surely*,” he exclaimed, “*the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!*”² And then he said, “*how awesome* is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” On Friday, July 26, this may have been Martin’s sudden and blessed realization.
- In each day since then, Martin’s family and friends have had to struggle with the sense that, he has somehow *slipped away from nearness* with us. After all, we no longer *see* his face as we did before; we no longer *hear* his voice with our ears, but *only* in our *memories*. In relation to death, *the heart of the paradox* that we must deal with, *is this*: *Sometimes, the Lord may seem far from us and from our lives in this world, rather than near*. Just as we often

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have a similar perception of our loved ones *after their deaths*. For *they* can *seem* far from us and our continuing lives in this world, *rather than near*.

- Yet, in Christ, *both* our Lord, *and* our departed loved ones, *are always equally near* to us! *Martin is as near to us now, as he was before! But now, in a different way* ~ *in a mystical and spiritual way*. We call this **the Communion of Saints**, *the sacramental unity* between all Baptized members of our Lord's mystical Body. This reminds us that, despite *whatever we do* to help or hinder our connections with others, there is always a *God-givenness* to our relationships. And God's loving grace *can always overcome* and heal our bonds with others, *even when* our attempts at reconciliation fall short.
- As we walk through these days, we experience ourselves pulled back and forth between *joy* about *what was before*, and *sorrow* for *what seems no longer to be*. For this is the nature of our grief over a departed loved one. *Memory* plays a key role in this process. And *we often think that what we say, and what others remember* about our previous conversations, reveal the most significant things about us. Yet, I think it may be fair to observe that Martin lived *in such a way as to confute* this common assumption. For Martin, as I knew him and as his family describes him, was a sensitive man with deep beliefs. *Add yet, Martin did not always put those beliefs into words*, at least in public settings.
- *Martin's family's witness to his deep and sincere faith rings true to me*, and to my experience of him here at Grace. *Before* the debilitating effect of his later illnesses, *Martin –as a former member of the choir– was a faithful member of Grace, dependably ever-present at worship*. I was especially delighted when Martin told me of his earlier participation in the life of a parish in South Bend, where my old friend, Dabney Smith, had been rector. *Martin's allegiance to Dabney and that parish told me a lot*. And, knowing that particular connection and history, endeared Martin to me.

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- Last week, I met with Alice, Emily, and Martha to prepare for this morning. Among several things they shared with me, **two stand out in sharp relief: first**, that Martin believed in each of his children; and, **second**, **that Martin saw himself, in his life and work as a physician, as a tool in God's hands**. Or, to put it more simply, **Martin believed that God used his talents and training in order to help others**. In today's world, this is *remarkable*. For in the secular-minded society around us, it is increasingly rare for someone to see his or her publicly-recognized employment as a context for the fulfillment of **our baptismal vocation**.
- Martin's self-perception about his vocation fits well with themes in John's Gospel, a portion of which we heard a few minutes ago. John boldly tells us that **"the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory**, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."³ The disciples knew *from their own experience* the power of these words, as **this feast day of Jesus' Transfiguration** reminds us. Their experience was confirmed again at the Last Supper, when Jesus told them how he was **the way, and the truth, and the life**.⁴
- Jesus *then* said this: **"If you know me, you will know my Father also**. From now on you **do** know him *and have seen* him... **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father...** [And] **very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do** and, in fact, will do greater works than these..."
- That Martin perceived his vocation as a physician **to be a form of ministry**, fits well with Jesus' words in John. **For as the Word became flesh in Jesus, so too** –through his gift of himself to us– **the Word continues to become flesh in us**. The Word becomes flesh **in our lives and work**, as well as **in our relationships with each other**. As this happens, the Word takes what at first may be frail and weak, and builds it up into **an expression of God's own shining glory**.

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- In this moment, *Martin now knows* these things *better* than we do. He knows how Jesus *is* the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. And Martin now *sees*, in a way that we cannot, how Jesus is the *alpha* and the *omega*, the *beginning* and the *end*, and *the one who makes all things new*.⁵ As the Lord attests through the words of Revelation, *the dwelling place of God is now among people* ~ *even among those* who do not readily perceive God's nearness to us. We *can* journey *forward*, *believing* that –*for God's faithful people*– *life is changed, not ended*.⁶ We *are* God's faithful people. And, just like Martin, *our lives have been changed* by God's Holy Spirit. Having been changed, *we, too, are now ready to see his glory*, and *enter* into eternity.
- For Jesus says *to us*, "I will come again and will take you to myself, so that *where I am, there you may be also*."



James Tissot, *The Last Discourse of our Lord Jesus Christ* {at the Last Supper}

John 14:1-6

Jesus said to his disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.** And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through me.”

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Notes:

¹ Psalm 116:13, as found in *The Book of Common Prayer*; BCP:760.

² See Genesis 28:16, in context.

³ See John chapter 1.

⁴ From today's Gospel reading, John 14:1-6. The quote in the following paragraph can be found in the further text of John 14.

⁵ For this and the following allusion, see Revelation chapter 21.

⁶ These words are found in 'the proper preface' for the Commemoration of the Dead, BCP:382.