

Yes, Jesus Really Did Pray for Us:
Standing on Holy Ground and Seeing Saints – Round Two!
The Rev. Dr. Barbara Anne Fisher – Assistant to the Dean –
Trinity Cathedral
The Seventh Sunday of Easter – Year C - June 2, 2019

No....it wasn't a mistake – the repeat of the silent reading from last week was intentional. After realizing the Gospel for this week is the beautiful 17th chapter of John – the one in which Jesus actually prays for me – and each one of you – I felt God leading me to stand longer on Holy Ground, and to share with you my own encounter with one of God's very special earthly Saints...

Listen carefully once again to the opening of today's Gospel reading: Jesus begins by praying for the disciples, "I ask not only on behalf of these..." "These" being those followers of Jesus' inner circle....and then Jesus prays, "...but also on behalf of those who will believe in me *through THEIR WORD...*" The "their word" to which Jesus is referring is the "word" which has spiraled through the centuries – the words which we now know as "sacred scriptures" - many of which were given to us by those of Jesus' original "inner circle." Listen again: "*but also on behalf of 'those' [which translates as me and each of you!] who will believe in me [meaning Jesus] through their [the inner circle of disciples] word [which we meet each time we read – or hear – sacred scriptures].*" And then, Jesus' prayer becomes a request for all of them – and through the years, us – to find the unity with God that Jesus knows, and for us all to "be one" – so that even the *world* may believe. Jesus' prayer then becomes a request that the love with which God loved Jesus, a love that was extended to Jesus even before the very creation of the world, be given to *us*. Jesus prays to his "Righteous Father" because he is concerned that the "world does not know [God]," and so Jesus asks God to grant his desire "so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them [us], and I in them [again, us]."

 And these words come *after* Jesus

has confirmed that he has given to them – and by inheritance, us – the very glory that God had bestowed on him!

How sacredly thin does the veil in this Cathedral feel now? Jesus prayed for each of us to receive the very shekinah glory that God had given him so that not only the love with which God had loved Jesus into being may be in us....but Jesus' Spirit as well! **+PREGNAT PAUSE+....**

Listen, now with deeper understanding, to words from the silent reading:

*“We do not always see that we should be moving about our days and lives and places with awe and reverence and wonder, with the same soft steps with which we enter the room of a sleeping child or the mysterious silence of a cathedral. ***There is no ground that is not holy ground. All the places of our lives are sanctuaries; some of them just happen to have steeples. And all the people in our lives are saints; it is just that some of them have day jobs and most will never have feast days named for them....***”*

This card I hold, so dear to my heart, was given to me for my 30th birthday in 1982 . It reads, “.....” – and is sealed with a kiss of my Saint’s signature bright orange lipstick. Gladys Hearne, the “wardrobe mistress” for decades at Muncie Civic Theater, was known for being extremely difficult with which to get along. And I must admit, I definitely was not one of Gladys’ favorites during the very first show I did in community theater with her! In fact, when she referred to me as “Pest” during “How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying” - the spring of 1970 – it was with derision and not the loving affection shown in this card!

The summer between my junior and senior year of high school had been rough. I wasn’t able to live at home due to extenuating circumstances surrounding my mother’s health. I also found myself not fitting in with the high school immaturity of “friends” as I faced an uncertain future. As my senior of high school began, I was alienated from the church of my childhood. I

had been told that I couldn't go to seminary to become a minister because "We don't ordain women." These many years later, I understand that for my shattered heart – I found my "sacred sanctuary" on the stage and in those precious saints of Muncie Community Theater. Through playing Dainty June in Gypsy – yes, I really did learn to tap, twirl a baton, sing badly, and dance with a "Moo Cow!" – I found a community...a "family," if you will...that loved me simply for being me! As I struggled to find the fortitude to attend classes the fall of my senior year so that I might graduate, it was the loving embrace each night of the cast and crew of Gypsy that gave me the strength to face another day.

But, one evening during Gypsy, Gladys found me crying as only a senior with a broken heart – and an uncertain future - can cry. I can still hear her voice as she waved a white hankie in front of my face as a sign of surrender with, "Don't think you can talk until you wipe your face....." Between gulps and sniffles, I finally was able to explain that I just didn't understand how so many of the people I had come to love in the show could be "gay" – that I just didn't get it.

For the first time, Gladys' hard exterior towards me melted away and I found myself wrapped in the biggest bear hug as I was swayed from side-to-side. Holding me tight, Gladys whispered into my ear, "Pest, oh, Pest – one day you WILL understand....I am so sure of that!" Oh, the words of prophecy that issued from her that night! Never once during the months that followed, in any of the conversations Gladys and I had - nor throughout her encouragement as I wrote a senior honors thesis entitled, "Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life," – did Gladys ever tip her hat to me that her "gaydar" had identified me as a member of the "Tribe" I was trying so hard to understand. I honestly believe Gladys was a Saint sent to keep me safe as I made the long journey home to embrace my tribe and find my true identity.

The 10 anniversary of Gladys' passing is the 16th of this month – and I know that she lives on in glory with the cloud of witnesses cheering me on. If you'd like to see how beautiful Gladys Hearne truly was, you can find her on the Internet in the historical files of Muncie Civic Theatre and in an article about her by Birdspeak. Oh, yes, the moniker by which Gladys was truly known is that of "Madame Gigi" – because, you see, my Saint was one of the last of the real "Gypsy- class" burlesque dancers. Yes, "the coming true is a journey made on Holy Ground"and, there are saints "whose hours and days and lives are spent carrying people to Christ, lending each other a hand when one of us has fallen, slipping along the river that brings joy to the heart of God, carrying God's peace and love and presence and life" to those they meet along the way....Any one can be a saint....We just need to realize that we stand on Holy Ground, and open our hearts to love – and be loved – for we never know what might be the credentials of the Saint sent to us from the very heartbeat of God.

What's your story of one of God's saints sent to you as a minister of God's love? May we become a community of love in which the sharing of saintly stories causes God's heartbeat to become a drumbeat of love – calling us forth to be ministering saints as well. Amen.....