

Oh to be back at last to the simplicity of St. Mark's Gospel! As I said over a month ago as we began our foray into St. John's Gospel – I think John is best done in small portions – too many Sundays of John's highly intellectualized writing – puts unnecessary spiritual stress on us all.

So we are back into Mark, now, for the remainder of the liturgical year – until the weekend before Thanksgiving --- only straying twice – to Matthew's Gospel on the Feast of All Saints – and back again to John's Gospel on the Feast of Christ the King.

But allow me to drag some of John's highly intellectualized writing back into St. Mark's Gospel – for this Sunday only. After all, you don't think I put all of that thinking into Transubstantiation only to use it once???

Remember last week, we were considering how that big word – transubstantiation – means simply there is a change on the inside – that is not reflected on the outside. . . In the celebration of the Mass, the host and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ on the inside – while outside they still look and taste like bread and wine.

Then I shared with you some of my own highly intellectualized thinking – that this is the way all Sacraments work – transubstantially --- babies look the same before and after Baptism --- Teens look the same before and after Confirmation --- Priests look the same before and after Ordination – Brides and grooms look the same before and after Marriage ---- and yet in all of those Sacraments ---- we believe a profound change has taken place on the inside. In each of those Sacraments --- we are opened to God's grace – that super-human power God gives us out of love --- that allows us to live life differently than before.

God goes about changing us from the inside out. God is in the business of changing hearts. So when the change has occurred – it ought to be reflected SOMEHOW on the outside by our words and actions.

Which is the opposite of how the scribes and Pharisees in this Gospel – and throughout the Gospels – tried to operate. They were focused on the outside – and thought if they said and did all the right things – then eventually that would bring about the necessary change on the inside. . . but it just doesn't work like that in God's world. God changes us from the inside out. . .

I mean haven't will all said things about another person: "Oh, his heart just isn't in it." Or "she's just going through the motions." That's when we end up doing things out of a sense of obligation – rather than out of a sense of joy for the one who has loved us so much – we just try our best to love him in return – and of course it is God that I am talking about. And if we, with all our faults – can tell the difference between someone who is going through the motions, and someone who is really commit to something – certainly God can!

God changes us from the inside out. . . If we put on the show – go through the motions – we might get compliments from other people. But when God's grace comes into our lives – We don't receive a nice compliment from God --- but a new heart. God promises us that in the prophet Ezekiel – "I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you. I will put MY spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees." We keep God's law – follow his commandments --- because our hearts have been changed. We don't keep God's law – follow his commandments in order to hopefully change our hearts. . . do you grasp the difference???

Because we have been Baptized – we belong to Christ. And the grace we receive through the Sacraments -- is God being a heart surgeon: cracking open our chests – removing our hearts – and replacing it with his own.

Rather than to tell you to change – God creates the change. Do we first have to clean up so he can accept us? NO --- God accepts us just as we are and then begins cleaning us up. God’s dream is not that we just get to heaven – but to get heaven into us. What a difference that makes!

And when we get that little bit of heaven in us – most especially through our reception of the body and blood of Christ – we become increasingly like Christ. . . little by little a new image of us emerges – not only on the inside – but also on the outside.

That, my friends, is why Jesus is always so critical of the scribes and Pharisees – they just don’t get it! They try over and over again to do it on their own – by going through the motions they hope to change themselves – while their hearts remain far from God.

But the important question is – do we get it? Do we get that we have to turn our hearts over to Jesus? Jesus takes the initiative -- He comes knocking at the door of our hearts ---- but only we can open the door.

Let’s do that today – let’s open the door of our hearts -- and leave here today – a little less human – and a little more divine.