

We Must Change or Face Death

A Sermon by Fr. Orlando J. Addison, Vicar

Holy Faith Episcopal Church, Port St. Lucie, FL

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Change is a word and concept that many people are afraid to hear. Many can't deal with it, some don't even want to talk about it, and others feel offended when the issue of change comes up. But why do people refuse to accept change in their lives, their homes, in their churches and in the world? Some experts believe that one of the reasons people refuse to accept change is fear, fear of the unknown, fear of the challenges change might bring.

However, the reality is that change takes place whether we want it or not, whether we agree with it or reject it. And those who refuse to accept change, whether in their lives, homes, church, or in the world, are usually people who prefer to live in the past. These are people who are stuck in the past.

Do you remember the good old days of the past when milk was delivered to your home; doctors came to see you when you were sick? Do you also remember the days when people came to church in great numbers, when children were in Sunday school and the church did not have enough space to accommodate all of them? Wouldn't you like to go back to the past? The problem is, the times have changed and so have the people.

Perhaps, some of you might want to remain in the past, some of you might lie awake at night, dreaming, wishing for the return of the 'good old days.' And you so desperately desire to go back to them and relive them! But this is not what God desires for us. God does not want us to live in the past, what God desires is for us to embrace the future.

In today's first reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah 43:18-19 the Lord says "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

Paul in his letter to the Philippians 3:13-14 writes: "Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."

Today too many churches are dying because their members refuse to forget the old ways of doing things, and are not spending time trying to discover where God is leading the church. They are not focused on what God is doing today but rather on the accomplishments of a past era --- and I will tell you that, if church members' focus is on a life that is past, the result will not be a new thing, the result will be certain death for the church. There are people who can tell you what went

on in their lives and in the life of the church 50 years ago, but they cannot tell you what God is doing today! He said, "I will do a new thing".

I challenge all of us today to focus on the new thing that God is bringing to pass here at Holy Faith; because if we do that, we will not join those churches that are dying, worshiping God in the old fashioned way; we will instead be a part of God's new creation. Let us leave the past behind and seek the God who is interested in the future...let us embrace today's technologies and use what can be effective, in our worship. Let us not be blinded by the past, and by the desire to relive it, but let us let go of the good old days so we can grasp the new thing God is doing in our lives, in our churches, and in the world.

Listen to some of the changes that have taken place in past years:

There have been more changes in the last 50 years than ever before in all history. More information has been produced in the last thirty years than in the previous five thousand years. More than one-half of the scientists who have ever lived are alive today.

Ninety percent of all the items in the supermarket today did not exist just ten years ago. It is estimated that 73% of college graduates are going into jobs which did not exist when they were born – 22 short years ago.

George Washington traveled from Virginia to Washington D.C. by horseback. It could take him ten days traveling at a speed of twenty-five miles per day.

Today's astronauts travel at over 25,000 miles per hour. At that speed you could fly from New York to San Francisco in just a couple of minutes.

I am hi-lighting the changes we have all seen just in our lifetimes. Sometimes the speed at which life seems to be going by, confuses us, and all we want to do is hibernate. We do not want to leave our comfort zone, and we do not want to be bothered with thinking about change.

But we cannot afford to hide our heads in the sand. To do so would not gain us anything worthwhile. We must know what is around us. Everything we're familiar with is changing, right before our eyes.

Churches have changed throughout the generations. Many people today say they do not like a church that isn't traditional. What do they mean by traditional? They usually mean a church that is like the church in which they were brought up.

But those churches have either changed to be relevant to today's society, or they are dying a slow death because they refuse to change – even for Jesus.

The Bible does not tell us to have a comfortable church that people like to attend. The Bible

expects churches to be houses where the truth of Jesus is offered to more and more people. There is an old saying among religious leaders that if a church is not growing, it is dying.

Many churches want to see numerical growth but they are having trouble reaching out to people. They say that when visitors come to their churches they don't return and they wonder why. Well here are some of the reasons why people don't visit or stay in our churches:

First, today's society is mostly "unchurched" and spiritually lost. They do not like tradition and they are used to learning in a different way. Consequently, if we are serious about reaching all those "unchurched" people out there, we will have to adapt what we do to the needs of the people outside the church. That's the first step to getting them inside the church.

Most of today's generation does not like to read like people did even 20 years ago. They would rather get their information from TV or the Internet. If the church wants these people to learn the word of God, then the church must present its message in the way that they can learn it ---the way they are used to.

If we at Holy Faith want to encourage the younger generation to join us here in the worship we offer to God, we must change and adapt. For example, we must provide power point and audio-visual aids. This is what they are accustomed to, and these are the tools that aid them in their learning. If we have these tools in this church you will see an increase in the number of those coming to worship with us.

The second reason why people don't visit or stay in our churches has to do with Music. The music most people listen to now is called contemporary. It is very upbeat and less "solemn" than some people are used to in church. And rather than having it sung to the backdrop of the Adam's Family organ, it is usually accompanied by an acoustic guitar, keyboard, and other instruments. Power point plays an important role with the music because it helps us move from looking at the words in a book with our heads tilted downward, and enables us to lift our heads and look to heaven while we praise the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The church needs to change in order to bring in the new generation. The church must present itself in such a way that the average person outside the church will accept us. And they will at least come in if we don't appear to be something that will remain unfathomable and beyond their understanding.

In general, people who attend worship at churches that have embraced change no longer wear suits and hats to church because the church has replaced them with open shirts and jeans. Churches that have welcomed changes in their worship, no longer expect people to sit and stare at the priest as he/she preaches. They offer them video points that enhance the message. They no longer sing just the old time hymns. They now sing music that they, the newcomers, can identify with. This is the future of the church, this is what God meant when He said in Isaiah 43:19 "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

God desires his church to change; He does not want his people to live in the past. God is in agreement with the incorporation of technology in His temple in order to reach out to the new generations. But what God does not want us to do, is to change His Word, He does not want us to change his message because his Word is eternal.

So, if we want to keep Holy Faith alive and vibrant, then we must use all of the tools God has given us today. And if we continue to hold on to the past and to offer worship that reminds us of the good old days, then the generations outside the church will have no interest in joining us, and eventually, Holy Faith, as a congregation, will die. The saddest part of this is that one day, all of us will stand in front of the Throne of God and explain to Him why we allowed His church to die.

Holy Faith, I know we can adapt. I know we can change. It is the Holy Spirit that changes the hearts of mankind, but we can change the other things like power point and audio visual tools, etc. These are things we can, and must do. Let us not be fearful. Let us not quench the Spirit. With Faith in Jesus Christ, let us step out of the boat. Let us begin today.

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