

Homily
May 5, 2024
6th Sunday of Easter
25:40-35:04

How many of us here like change? Raise your hands. I don't mean the stuff in your pocket. I mean how things change. How many of you here don't like change? Raise your hands. More negative than positive which is not unusual. But change is kind of a constant in our lives, isn't it?

In English, "change" is a word we use in so many varied ways. For example:

Change the lightbulb.

A change of clothes.

A change-up, for those who are of a baseball mind.

A change of location of a business.

Climate change.

Sea change.

And of course, spare change, loose change and correct change.

Then there is the change of life for some.

Change of career for others.

Or a change of heart.

An attitude change.

And a change of mind.

When we look at all of these variations, I would suggest that there are three basic threads that run throughout. First, change is an action on our part which brings about an exterior or physical change in our surroundings. Change of location.

Change in a condition affecting us that can be beyond our power.

And change in an interior refocus, which we choose often for the common good.

Our First Reading is from Chapter 10 of the Acts of the Apostles and the entire chapter's main character is Peter. What we didn't hear was the beginning part where Peter is in Joppa. It's a coastal city. There he is living and preaching. And as the chapter unfolds, we witness changes in his surroundings, changes beyond his power and interior changes.

The other main character is Cornelius. He is a centurion, prominent, living in Caesarea, a Roman coastal harbor that the Romans built when they annexed Palestine into their empire. Cornelius, as it tells us, was a God-fearing man, prayerful and just. He is one who could have been among those God-fearers – not Jews, but God-fearers - who went to the synagogues and even the Temple for prayer.

We hear that he gave alms to support the needy among the local population of the Jews. And while in prayer he receives a messenger of God who urges him to seek out Peter in Joppa, just north of Caesarea. And so Cornelius sends his servants to invite Peter to come to his house.

Nearly at the same time, as it says, Peter is in prayer in Joppa. It's noon. Driven by hunger while in prayer, for it was noon, he has a vision. The vision is a large cloth coming down from heaven with all the four-legged animals known to humankind in Creation. He is urged three times to slaughter and eat what is before him. But he refuses three times. For you see, he is an observant Jew and would not eat of any unclean animal in Creation.

Well, Cornelius' men arrive and persuade Peter to accompany them to the house. And when Peter enters the house - ironically thus making himself unclean, for Jews were not to go into the house of a Gentile – he speaks. And that's the beginning of our reading.

Now, the changes in Peter: First, he undertakes an action that brings about an exterior physical change in his surroundings. He goes to Caesarea. He has a vision during prayer. He also has visitors come unexpectedly. Conditions of change beyond his power.

And Peter proclaims the breadth of God's love, even to the Gentiles. This is his interior change of focus which he chooses for the common good of all the Gentiles. And amid all this, the Spirit is at work prompting, urging, offering possible changes for the good of all humankind.

Now, I'm not sure any of us have faced such a major shift in our lives in so short a time. It must have left Peter's head spinning. He finds himself doing things voluntarily that he normally would not do. He finds himself exposed to the will of God in ways over which he has no control. He finds himself so moved by God's Spirit that his very heart is changed. And he brings the grace of baptism to those whom he had thought before unworthy, untouchable.

I'm not sure, but have any of you ever faced so many changes in such a short period of time in your life, where the world was completely upside-down? At least your world.

Was it a jarring and previously avoided change of place? How many have had to move not by your free choice? (Raising his hand) Or was it an unexpected change of direction in your life? A job disappeared and you had to seek out another. A career change from one career that you had been in for a long time and suddenly you can't find a job there. And so what are you doing? You're reworking your life.

Or perhaps it was an interior change that turned your world upside-down. Maybe a change in your moral compass. Or was it a new appreciation for an individual or a group you once considered as "outsider," or worse?

Perhaps some of these possibilities in our lives, these moments of drastic change, were an invitation from the Holy Spirit to be more aligned with the Gospel's universal call of love. That call which was so clearly stated in both the Second Reading and the Gospel today.

Yes. We may not like change. We may embrace it readily. It is a reality in our lives.

And I believe, my brothers and sisters, in the spirit of what we have heard this day in Peter's life. We might be pondering those moments in our life. You may have just realized once again through these examples. Ponder them. Perhaps in the midst of them, the Holy Spirit is giving you an opportunity to change.