

July 06, 2008 – SERMON SUMMARY

Let's be transformed..... Romans 12.2

There is a Latin American singer, Mercedes Sosa, who sings a song with a message which says: Changes, every thing changes. If everything changes, that I change is not strange. And she refers to the changes in nature, the seasons, in the animals changing their skin and the trees their leaves, the changes in the geography, in the sky. Change is an established universal rhythm in the nature of the things. But, even though all this a reality, there is something for the singer that never changes: and that is her love for her country and her people.

Saint Paul writes to the Christians of Rome. For the people of this city to become Christian is a radical change, in the whole morality and behavior. "Who is in Christ, is a new creation". Every thing is new, the past is over. This is the message of evangelical people everywhere. We preach change, conversion to a new life. This is the good news of forgiveness and new beginning. We do believe in the possibility of this change. It doesn't matter how sinful a person is, he or she can change. I'm a chaplain in the prison in Cuba. Some of the inmates are in a maximum security prison. My greatest inspiration is to hear the testimony of some of these men who have a very dark past. Some were killers who are now living a new life, characterized by a peaceful relationship with the other inmates and a commitment to evangelization. They are new creatures in Christ, indeed.

However, our danger, our great mistake as evangelicals, is to be so satisfied with the conversion achievement, that we don't pay enough attention to the need to be constantly growing.

Saint Paul was excited with the Christians in Rome, but he wanted to remark on some things:

- The true worship to God is to offer the whole body, the whole being, not just a part of ourselves, not only a religious feeling, not a day in the week, not just part of the income, but the whole life has to be under God's will. There is no way out; either we take our faith seriously, or we shouldn't pretend to be Christians.
- Paul also calls us not to be conformed to the trends of this world. We cannot be Christian and pretend to live in the same way as the people who are not followers of Jesus. Not to be conformed to the anti values of egocentrism and selfishness, the violence and dominance this causes suffering in the living.
- Paul emphasizes that the Christian challenge is to live in a permanent transformation. Transformation is a process of new conversion; we need to convert again and again. When we forget this, we are decaying; we are in danger of losing our capacity to be salt and light to the world.

Then, I would ask: What does it mean, this call to a permanent transformation?

1. The Bible says that the God's calling is a call to move. God called Abraham to go out from his nation, his culture, and his people to a new land. He was named the father of the faith, for his readiness to follow the call without knowing exactly where he was going to. This is the nature of a follower of Jesus. "Look where I dwell, I don't have a house or a place to rest my head", said Jesus to those who pretended to follow him. We belong to a category of people called pilgrims, always going forward to the Kingdom of God.

2. This means not simply the capacity to move our place of residence perhaps that is the easiest thing to do. But something different is the freedom to live without dependence on material things. Paul said: I have learned to be happy, whatever my circumstances. . I know how to live humbly and to have richness... to be satisfied as well as to be hungry. I can do all things in Christ" Filips. 4.11-13. This is true freedom. This is to go against the present culture which says to you: to be happy you need to have more and more. Happiness depends on the things that you are able to get. But, please, the Bible doesn't teach that we do not need material things to live. We are people of needs. Jesus recognized the need for food and clothes and rest. However, the actual tendency of a growing dependence on consumption which is part of our culture is a true challenge to our faithfulness to the Gospel of freedom.
3. Transformation means a permanent state of watching, awake to see and discover the will of God for us today. We don't have to be faithful in the way that in the past our fathers in the faith were. Jesus talked about the discernment of the signs of the times that is to find the path of the God's action in the present. We have his direction in the Holy Scriptures, like the sign in the road for the driver, but the driver has to be awake to the surprises and changes in the road. We have to be attentive to what God is doing for the world in our generation.
4. We never should be satisfied with our achievement as Christians. In my age, with more than 50 years in the faith I constantly pray, Lord, don't allow my heart to become hard, insensitive to what you are teaching me. Keep me like a child at your feet. As a song prays: renew me, Lord.

Nevertheless, there are obstacles that make this transformation difficult for us. There are many, but I want to mention just three: routine, commodity and fear.

1. We have a tendency of doing things as a simple routine. We are people of routine. That means that we want to walk following the same path of yesterday, to keep doing things as we did in the past. Let me illustrate with a strange experience in our city. One day, I was driving, when I noticed that the traffic was moving very slowly. I tried to know why the cars were going so slowly, and realized that the reason was a horse left without any control, walking on the middle of the street. The horse was marching very proudly, elegant, indeed. The cars were following it, some taking photos. The horse turned a corner, passed the bridge, entered another neighbourhood safely going to some place. What place? He was following his routine way to the stable. The place where he used to go, ignoring that he was free to go to the pasture, not far away. But he had the order, the master in his brain. The example is very simple, but how much time we act following routine, behavior written in our brains too. With the difference that we look for reasons and justifications. Why do we do most of the time the things we do? We follow the examples of others. Many of what we believe are our own decisions are learned from our parents, or our environment. Just a single example, let's think about the way we do the distribution of work in the home. When I was a boy it was very inappropriate for a man to help cleaning the home, or doing the laundry. These were the tasks of women. Who taught that? In what book was it written that the men can't share in housework? Just for following the routine learned from generation to generation.
2. Commodity. Transformation means sometimes abandonment of our commodity. Through the years we have invented an easy way to believe that we are followers of Jesus. We have constructed huge temples, complicated institutions, religious activities, and we say this is the way to be followers of Jesus. But, we forget the high price of being called a

Christian, which is to walk humble, to love mercy and to practice justice. We have constructed Christianity without sacrifice. We love commodity, we prefer to give some money than to give ourselves.

3. Fear. To be faithful to this transformation sometime put us in fear of been found in situations of conflict. We prefer to remain in the safe shadow of the majority. We prefer to keep silence. In Cuba we had during almost 30 years a situation in which many people didn't want to attend the Church because they felt the fear of being classified as religious people, they could lose an important position in a job, or a career. On the other hand, some Christians feel the fear of breaking the traditions and practices of their own community, in the case of some denominational emphasis. For example, we suffer misunderstanding when we preach that we should seek unity among all the Christian denominations.

But the way of Jesus is not the way of routines, commodities and fears. A true follower looks for experiences of renewal every day. However, to live in permanent conversion doesn't mean that we are religious without strong convictions. We are upon the rock, He is the foundation of our faith. But at the same time we are living stones. And the law of every living creature is to grow. This is not an easy change of mind. For this Paul says: The renewal of our minds through the knowledge of the good will of God.

Transformation of the Christian comes through the right meditation and reflection on the Word of God. We have to be careful. We have to be convinced by ourselves through the serious study of the Bible. We don't have to receive interpretation blindly. We need to confront the truth of the Bible with the reality such as we are living now. We have to be open to what other Christians are saying, but, above all, to be open to the Holy Spirit given to all Christians. This is the time of looking for the will of God for our world. We have meditated, for example, on our human responsibility for the environment. On the Christian responsibility for the peace and human poverty. We need to be transformed to be ready to hear Jesus praying that all his followers be one, as He is One with the Father.

Let God's blessing be upon us, as we look for transforming experiences in our hearts, minds and feelings. Amen.

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