

Restoration

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"The postmodern context forces a kind of continual fragmentation and spinning out from a center. It is indeed a decentering experience. In this context, restoration, or the exercise of baptismal and chrismal sacramentality, demands not so much a removal from the fallen and decentered world, but an attentiveness to the larger picture, the wider context, the metanarrative that holds all the disparate parts together."

--Richard Valantasis, from "Centuries of Holiness: Ancient Spirituality Refracted for a Postmodern Age"

One

of the funny sidelights of owning a chiminea (and Facebooking about making fires in it on a frequent basis) is that I have kind of become the "Parish incinerator for holy objects." Things like slightly "off-smelling" chrism, leftover blessed palm fronds, or worn out corporals or altar linens seem to find their way into my chiminea to be burned. I think part of it is folks in my parish know I love to burn stuff, and they also know my fire-sitting spot is, at least to me, a holy space. I have often used liturgies from the Book of Occasional Services when burning these objects. They are holy objects that deserve holy space and holy treatment of their being taken out of service. They are items that served their purpose and their season of use is over.

But I have come to realize I don't see this activity as "destroying" these things, but rather, restoring them. Somehow, in my mind, as they are reduced to ashes, they become unleashed prayers, unspoken hopes now set free, and doors opened to new possibilities as we close the doors on the old ones. They are restored to the sum total of

their spiritual glory by releasing them from their physical disrepair.

Recently,

I have been in a position to consider some other "old worn out holy objects"--some of the traits that brought me to a place of relative security and comfort in my world. After all, it is Lent. It's a time to assess what within me is still "in season" and what is now "out of season." What's viable, what's dead, what's worn and repairable, and what's worn and probably not worth repairing.

Over the years, I

developed many traits that were, frankly, necessary for survival. There were times in my life these traits literally kept me alive, or kept me from going crazy. But since there's no such thing as a free lunch, those things also created spiritual blind spots in me. They cultivated "resigned hopelessness" to things I simply considered "my fate." They stopped me from drawing close to others, or letting them close to me. They were once a holy thing, and now they are past their season. It's time to retire them in holiness, and allow them to be transformed into other things.

Oh, don't get me wrong--I know there are basic aspects of my personality that will never change--nor, probably, should they. I think some of those things, I was just born with them, and there they are. As we say around here, "leopards don't change their spots." But that doesn't mean there aren't vast and infinite ways we can be transformed wearing the same spots. That doesn't mean we can't be restored. But what it does mean is we're not allowed to pick the forms of restoration.

An old altar corporal, once thrown in my chiminea, will never be an altar corporal again. But it can be transformed into ash that can be put anywhere that a living, growing thing needs a bit of a pH change--a patch of perennials near my house, my asparagus bed, or the base of one of my trees. For that matter, even dumping it in the yard and letting the wind take it where it may is perfectly fine. There are no guarantees, but something already starting to grow is liable to benefit from this transformation, and although the

odds are unpredictable, there is still a great deal of hope that *something* will be restored as a result of it. I just can't force or predict the "what" in it.

It's possible that corporal no longer *needs* to be a corporal. After all, someone bought replacements. It's free to be part of an infinite number of things once it becomes ash. It can travel several states away. I remember when Mount St. Helens blew in 1977. A few days later, the cars in our driveway in Missouri were covered with volcanic ash. I remember being in awe of "how far it had come."

When I think about each of the people in my world, myself included, I often marvel at how far each of us has come in some journey. Being able to share those stories and observations takes the fear away for me about the realization that things within me are being torn down and unpredictable new things are being built up. Sometimes I grieve too much over the things coming apart and sometimes not enough, but when I can feel the growth, it feels powerful and so much bigger than me, than just "me." In that, I can understand better the true meaning of "restoration"--not just for my own restoration but for the idea that all of us are being restored--even people I don't "get" or people I don't particularly like or understand. I'm learning that everything in the whole world doesn't require me to get into a fight to "make it happen" and everything that seems unattainable doesn't require beating it to shreds with a fire axe to create a hole in which I can slip through. I can let things burn and trust to the power of the ashes to create growth. I can let things stand and look for open doors and windows. I can keep walking and see new and better realities that I would have missed, had I become fixated on something seemingly unattainable.

But what's exiting is that all doesn't happen alone, and it's happening to others at the same time it is happening to me. *That's* restoration.

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