

5th Sunday after Pentecost, C
Isaiah 60: 10-16
Galatians 6:1-10, 14-18
Luke 10:1-12, 16-20

I have only been to a psychic once in my life. It was in the New York City, during my last year of seminary. Luckily, it was not one of those neon lights in the windows sort of places, blinking “Tarot reading”. Fredrick, my psychic, functioned by appointment only out of his two story penthouse in the West Village. Very exclusive. I did not schedule the meeting. A friend made a reservation with another friend and suddenly found herself without a companion. She offered to pay for me to join her. Fredrick’s “gift” I was informed is looking at pictures and then talking about those people. I was told to bring 4 photos of different people for my session. On the appointed evening, I brought pics of my Grandfather, my Grandmother, Robert, and me. My friend and I arrived at the apartment and were buzzed in. We met Ramone, Fredrick’s partner. Ramone ushered us into the living room where the odor of Clove cigarettes hung in the air. We were told to sit on an over-sized white leather sofa and wait. We watched the over-sized television. Pat Sajak told a contestant to take another spin, and my friend was called in. Meanwhile, prizes were lost and won. My friend eventually returned, shaking her head and saying, “Wow.” I was up next. I trudged up the stairs and found Fredrick sitting behind a large desk. He summoned me forward with a flick of his wrists. He motioned to a seat, and I sat down. He began writing, and then held up a card that read, “Religious.”

I suddenly felt a little like those dreams of being naked while everyone else is fully clothed. I wanted to rethink my visit. Just how much could he see? I pulled out a photo of my Grandfather, who was in the hospital at the time. It was my test to see if he could see that my Grandfather was ill. Fredrick’s response was, “Why aren’t you on the plane. He’s dying.” “Wow” came to mind. Fredrick then moved on to my Grandmother. “If she got run over by a bus, I’d feel sorry for the bus,” Fredrick flippantly replied. She is a tad on the difficult side. Fredrick then looked at a picture of Robert. Robert and I had been dating for about three months, and Fredrick said, “Come back when you’ve lived together for a year, and we’ll talk about children.” It has been a year, now. Then, he came to me. He asked me what I did. I told him that I was in training to be a priest. He held up a sign that said “school.” But he said that he was puzzled, that he saw me working in a school, not attending one. I asked if that was where I would be working when I graduated. “Can’t tell.” He held up a few more cards, telling me that I would be working very hard very soon, possibly in a hospital. And Fredrick told me we were finished.

Oddly enough, the next week, I started serving as a chaplain at St. Luke’s school and began working in hospitals, and he was right about my family. But Fredrick was also wrong, really wrong. I know that I mentioned that it was my last year in seminary, but I should also say that my visit to Fredrick was on September 10th, 2001 at 9:00 PM. Fredrick missed a lot, like the fact of why I would be working in the hospital or in schools, both of which were because of 9/11. None of my photos, apparently, availed him to what was coming.

In today's Gospel, Jesus looks into the future and begins to tell what he sees. But Jesus does not function like the exclusive psychic Freddrick who misses the big, tremendous, life-altering events of our world. Instead, Jesus makes a prediction about the end of his life, another pivotal moment. Jesus says, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning." And these words, taken as a prediction of Jesus' death are what I would like to talk about today: How did Jesus foresee the nature of his death, and what does seeing Satan fall actually mean.

Jesus apparently did foresee his death. That part, we have heard in other readings, not only today's Gospel. But how he predicted the end of his life is not the result of some magic trick. He did not have a photo of himself. And his fortune was also not the result of some predestined ideal of suffering, which some theologians claim. Instead, Jesus knew how he would die because he knew how humans work, and he knew how he would naturally fit into that picture as the son of a loving God. Namely, Jesus knew that his society and all others are most often based on a foundation of excluding people. He saw that we often attempt to create unity by creating in groups and out groups. In fact, Let me read to you about a historical figure often compared to Jesus in the second century, Apollonius of Tyana. In the reading, Apollonius goes to Ephesus during an epidemic, and he performs a miracle to "heals" the problem. Apollonius says to the Ephesians, "Take courage, for I will today put a stop to the course of disease." Sounds lovely. He leads the population of the town to a theater. There, he finds an old blind man, and Apollonius says to the crowd, "Pick up as many stones as you can and hurl them at this enemy of the gods." Eventually, the people do hurl the stones, and by killing this man, this group finds unity and feels healed of its disease. It is a bloodletting of the worst variety. But what is interesting is that the writer of the story in the second century has no idea of how horrific the event is. Without sarcasm, the event is called a miracle, compared to Jesus because the event did, to some extent, unify the people. This is what Jesus saw. (Girard, *I see Satan Fall Like Lightning*, p. 49).

But before you think this is extraordinary, or just some second century scandal, an example in yesterday's *Times*. In an article about an Episcopal Parish in Connecticut that is leaving the Episcopal Church because of our gay and lesbian ordaining ways, the Rector said that the almost unanimous vote "to affiliate with the more conservative group [was]... a show of unity for a congregation that had trouble agreeing on anything before..." In other words, beating up on a marginal group, helped unify them. (NY Times, 7-7-07)

But Jesus saw that such a form of unity can never last. Jesus saw that we cannot use violence to avoid violence, cast stones to heal, that we can not use Satan to cast out Satan, like Apollonius or that Rector. In fact, when Jesus encounters a situation in which people are getting ready to stone a woman accused of adultery to find unity, Jesus stops the crowd. Instead, Jesus invites us to find a new form of unity, a unity that exists by each of us serving one another, even the people who are traditionally outcasts. Jesus would not have stoned the old blind man, he would have reached out to him. He goes to the margins. But Jesus also saw that by doing so, he would challenge the very foundation of our society and how we unify ourselves. To do so, he knew, would result in his death.

And, here's the rub. If Jesus had not died. If he had not been willing to undergo such a death, we as human beings would never have realized that Apollonius was a murderer and not a miracle worker. When we killed the son of God, something changed. People did find unity, yes. In fact, we are told that on that day, Herod and Pilate became friends. But we also see that such a unity did not work, did not last, because Jesus would not stay dead. The system did not work. The only unity that lasts is God's life-giving, resurrecting love.

And so Jesus saw Satan fall like a flash of lightning. Everything that had been not of God falls, because we are finally shown what is really miraculous: the love of God. And every time we remember that we find unity by feeding one another. Every time we step up and demand that not one more blind mendicant be murdered, we are, in a way, predicting the future. We are looking at a present and a past that have had a difficult and challenging foundation. And we are seeing a future that is Easter and a future that connects us to God.