

Trinity Sunday
St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA

May 26, 2024
Rev. Paul Moore

Honor

A couple of weeks ago I attended the last session of Let's Go Together, hosted by Terry Kylo down at the Lincoln Theater. It was the third of three activities, a meal, a work day and then this, a celebration of diversity. He challenged us to just "go and do it!" At the beginning and again toward the end, Swil Kanim, violinist virtuoso and member of the Lummi Nation, played for us. His music transported me, took me to another place that is hard to describe. It reminded me of when I heard Kevin Paul sing a Swinomish song of leave-taking at the blessing of Sedna, Dan and Elizabeth's boat.

Then he spoke. He thanked us all for being here. He reminded us that in his tradition, when children run around and make noise, one is to remember that they are fresh from the Creator, and still express the Creator's joy, so, their noise is sounds of heaven. Then he said something truly astounding. He honored us. The messages to be brought, the people in attendance were all a great honoring of one another. I knew in an instant that I had the theme for my Trinity Sunday sermon.

After all, seminal theological discourse about the nature of the Trinity goes back to the 4th century, when the Cappadocian fathers, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, wrote what has become the foundation of western Trinitarian thinking. They are the ones who came up with the idea that the three persons of the Trinity are forever engaged in a perfect dance of self-giving love, and out of that dance spins all of creation. When Swil Kanim talked about honoring, I got a sense of what that dance might look like: Three persons, continually honoring one another, lifting up one another, thanking one another, bowing to the essence of one another—a loving dance of honor.

In today's first reading, the prophet is granted a vision of the heavenly throne-room with angels, seraphim and cherubim praising God. It's all so grand and glorious that he feels, in comparison, unworthy. How can he have honor in the presence of such glory? How can he be anything but the least of the worshippers of the Holy One? Well, he is in for a surprise. The seraph comes and takes a burning coal from the fire and touches his lips with it, burning away all sense of a lack of honor. Then, the voice comes, "Who will go?" The prophet blurts out, "Here am I, send me!" What strikes me about this is that the honor he is bestowed moves him immediately to action. The glory of heaven does not just amaze us, it also moves us. The Trinity, it would seem, is not so much a theological idea to believe in the mind, but a call to action.

What does it mean to grant honor that leads to action? Many years ago, a priest came to me after church on Sunday morning. Ten days prior, the bishop had come to the Church

of Our Savior, on Jim Miller Road in Dallas. He had confirmed Karisse and me—we became Episcopalians. Now, the priest, who had taught us our Inquirer's Class, our pastor and friend, approached me after church. "We need to go visit the bishop, because you need to become a priest."

Woah! I didn't have a bachelor's degree, much less any formal theological education. Besides, I had other plans. We were to return to Ecuador with Wycliffe Bible Translators as community development specialists and cross-cultural trainers. This would be a total and dramatic change. Yet Fr. Carr had seen something in me that I didn't really see clearly yet. I must have suspected something, because somehow it didn't catch me totally by surprise. The thought lingered—wouldn't go away, kept just lying there on the edge of my awareness, waiting for me to look its way.

We did prepare and go back to Ecuador. It took 18 months to raise our financial support and to finalize a Masters in Intercultural Administration. During that time, I put that "something" to the test. Clearly, you see the results. Fr. Carr was right. He honored me, lifted up my true calling for me to see, and I acted on it. Come November, I'll celebrate 33 years as a priest.

To honor someone is to see them with the heart. Honoring is not a judgment call. It neither idolizes them nor demonizes them. It just sees them for the sacred beings that God has made them to be. It is to recognize their being, to hold them up just as they are, nothing more and nothing less; to grant them the dignity of being a human being, and to place them in the glow of the divine.

When we honor someone, it frees them to be who they are with you and others. During that time in Ecuador, I did what all 20-somethings try to do, and that is entirely too much. I tried to fulfill my job at the mission as best I could. We had Landon, growing our family to 3 children. I learned falconry, and I studied theology part-time. The rector of the seminary was from Colorado, come to run the seminary. He and I became friends. We were talking once about my return to the US. I had a hundred questions. How would I fit in with my background? What role would I play? What is the life of a parish priest like? We were talking about all that, and how my half-Hispanic side would play out, and he told me, "Don't worry, Paul, the Church needs priests like you."

He honored me, and I have honored that honoring. I now hold 3 advanced degrees that relate in one way or other to multicultural ministry. All of my calls have included some dimension of multicultural ministry with Anglos and Hispanics, and we, here, are no exception. Honoring gives people place and value just for being who they are, nothing more and nothing less. It opens the door for them to live into their own potential, to flesh out their own sacred humanity.

Now again, many of you know what I am going to say next. The world is a place that

selectively honors. Some are more honorable than others. Generally, those who share the worldview of dominant, U.S. based white culture, and especially those who are born into it. All others get degrees of honor, from disregard to outright oppression. They buy houses at high prices and sell them at low prices, they get watched by law enforcement more rigorously, they get convicted and incarcerated at higher rates for the same offenses, they get evicted for little reasons, they get overlooked for promotions, you all know the litany.

In doing so, the world forgets its own roots. If the Godhead spins creation out of a mutual honoring, it is only by truly honoring one another that we engage in the divine dance ourselves.

Here in this space, we are engaged in an experiment of honoring. We are learning what it is like to honor people of another culture, language and tradition. It's not easy all the time, but perhaps it honors us to recognize that, if we are recipients of and participants in the healing and restoration that God is working in the world, then that healing and restoration begins with those close to us, who live and move and have their being in this building with us. The action of honor calls us to honor the life and ministry of Resurrección. It calls us to honor its members, their language, their culture, their stories and their hopes for the future. It calls us to create on earth a place where divine honor is played out, not denied.

That honoring calls us to action beyond our walls. What we learn here we must take into the world, that the world might see and know that ALL are being called back into the dance of mutual honor, and that to do that, action must be taken to honor ALL.