

EPIPHANY 2014

As we move into our seventh year, I am reminded that our church has established seven as “the age of reason.” Perhaps this has to do more with the theological concept of seven being the “perfect” number than it does with the reasonable expectation that anyone is capable of “reasoning” his or her way through theological concepts at that age. Nevertheless, living in our seventh year seems to place weightier demands on us than living in our sixth year did. We are, after all, one year wiser, one year more experienced at the “practice” of our faith as the Therese Community. And yes, in this past year, we have indeed done a lot of learning and changing. Our epiphanies have been manifold. So have those experiences that remain shrouded in darkness and despair. We have lived in both light and dark throughout the year 2013.

My Epiphany letter last year was very short and pointed—and was sent out only to the bishops in the state of Missouri, ordinarys and auxillarys, as well as emeriti. Because every month of January “features” a Vocation Awareness Week that follows on the heels of the great celebration of Epiphany, I sent each man a handwritten notecard, with my businesscard enclosed, that said simply: // Dear Brother Raymond, Are you aware of all the vocations in your diocese? Shalom. // Would you believe I got nary a response?

On January 16, Greg Tucker died. Greg and his lovely wife Annie were one of us in our infancy, “regulars”—who suddenly weren’t anymore without any reasons being given, one of those who broke our collective hearts. He was only 57-years old. The Memorial service, on January 26, was going on at the same time as was the Memorial Mass for St. Louis icon Stan Musial. There seemed to be a bit of poignant serendipity in that, and I came away from it all with a great hope that Annie would return to us. She hasn’t.

In February it was brought to my attention that the FOSIL (Faithful of Southern Illinois) group, who had assembled Ree Hudson, Marybeth McBryan and myself a year earlier to talk about how we might liturgically serve their community, was working outside of Roman Catholicism and attending liturgies with the ECC (Ecumenical Catholic Communion). Another heartbreaker.

Being faced with the absolute necessity for doing things differently after having watched first Marybeth and then Ree leave our Community in the preceding years, we had come together with new plans and new promise that were initiated with the new liturgical year in December of 2012. February saw a very important first from this planning—the first weekend of my being away and Therese’s new pastoral associate, Mary Hammett, taking on responsibility for the Saturday liturgy. A family that takes care of one another, stands in for one another, trusts one another took a giant step forward in realizing their radical inclusive equality on that second weekend of February.

While Therese carried on without me, I traveled to Toledo for the first Great Waters Region ordinations of 2013, Beverly Bingle to the priesthood and Ann Klonowski to the transitional diaconate. Bev was the seventh priest I had been blessed to see ordained since becoming the program coordinator for our RCWP region in 2008. There is that “lucky” number seven again! And, in the event that I were to miss the significance of it, on the day I was preparing to head back to St.

Louis, my leave-taking was cut short by the shocking announcement of Pope Benedict's resignation! Wonders truly never cease!

February being the shortest month of the year, it outdid itself in affairs of monumental importance during 2013. On the heels of the ordinations and resignations came Lent, the birth of my twelfth great-grandchild, and a rare opportunity to share the after-Therese Saturday night dinner with Rodger Kalbfleisch & Terry Griffith. It would be the last dinner most of us would ever share with Rodger & Terry.

In March, in very short order, a new pope was both elected and enthroned in time to celebrate Easter with the world, and what a heady sense of *aggiornamento* Pope Francis has brought into a church that had battened down the hatches on the day Pope John Paul I was found dead in his bed.

Our very special Holy Week literally closed out the month, and included for the first time a sit-down Seder Meal with exquisite food—even including roasted lamb—around a perfect table of pseudo-Jewish disciples. On that holy night, Therese was blest with the presence and participation of a married priest-couple, Ron Koch & Mary Grace Crowley-Koch, from the Chicago area.

April was notable at Therese for what happened on the final weekend of the month—the return of Rodger to the fold. We had not seen him since Ash Wednesday, way back on the 13th of February. We did not suspect, on that 27th day of April, that we would never see him again.

In May, we lost Rodger for the last time. He too was only 57-years old. Rodge died probably on Mother's Day, but the family listed the date of death as a week later, on Pentecost Sunday. That same Pentecost Sunday saw the demise of Suzsanne Singer, founder of the Singer Institute and the Senior Connections program which had been such an important part of my early priestly ministry. It never ceases to amaze me how many special people die during the Season of Easter, the Season of Resurrection.

In June, Joan Moorhem and I traveled to St. Cloud to be with a mutual friend, Martha Sherman, as she was ordained a priest for the Midwest Region, RCWP. And the following weekend Therese proudly marched in the Pride Parade with a newly-formed coalition of friends calling ourselves "Welcoming Catholic Communities." The result of efforts spearheaded by CAN, we all were overwhelmed with the welcome that we received from so many ostracized sisters and brothers in the LGBTQ communities of St. Louis.

Early in July, I hosted the IAWM Assembly held here at the Pallottine Renewal Center. IAWM is the International Association of Women Ministers, an association that was officially chartered into being in 1919 right here in St. Louis. It is an honor to belong to such a prestigious and unpretentious professional ministerial association.

On August 18 we celebrated a Memorial Mass for Rodger, the best way in which we could pay him tribute and bring closure to our collective grief. Many of his childhood friends came and celebrated

with us as we remembered him in stories, and of course in his beautiful music, a perpetual living legacy.

September found me on the road again, this time to Cleveland for the priestly ordination of Ann Klonowski. Then in early October to Cincinnati for the diaconal ordination of Paula Hoeffler. And at the end of October, another ordination right here at Therese. What great hosts we were, as Mary Keldermans and Lillian Lewis were ordained transitional deacons in the main sanctuary and feted with Imo's Pizza in Fellowship Hall.

We ended November with another interesting first—a First Sunday of Advent liturgy that incorporated the US holiday of Thanksgiving and the Jewish Hanukkah. We were told that Hanukkah had not coincided with Thanksgiving since 1888, and that it won't again until (I think) something like 2140. A portion of one of the rabbinic prayers we used that day has become a permanent part of our liturgy since then.

And now, of course, we begin anew. The Season of Advent in December led to the Season of Christmas that ends with this holy Epiphany, this wondrous opportunity to, once again, consider what epiphanies have moved and molded us in the past year to become who we are as we live into this year. Our Epiphany liturgy gave us pause to consider the thin space between the here and the hereafter, as emergency vehicles moved into the alleyway and a mystery person was carried away from what suddenly became a crime scene filled with the cars of Therese members.

As the starry skies hide themselves under a thick cloud of swirling snow, this Epiphany is a holy time for meditation, contemplation, prayer. What light has shone in our darkness? What star has propelled us forward? What dream has been recalled and reclaimed as our truth? How will this year be lived differently because of our epiphanies, both personal and communal?

O Holy Wisdom, teach us to esteem our life as journey. How can we make it to the end faithfully?

Epiphany blessings, and holy haj.

Shalom,
Elsie