

2 Lent C

March 17, 2019

St. Patrick

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Calling someone an “alien”—well, it carries the sense you’re unwelcome. You don’t belong. Folks don’t want to be called “aliens” these days in our nation. In an earlier season of my life, I lived in another country for six years. I was officially labeled a “straniero,” that is, a “foreigner, an “alien.”

This Lenten Sunday the Apostle Paul teaches us that, in fact, *we* don’t belong: **“Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body.”**

Oh, yes, I have my U.S. passport, and it specifies that I’m a citizen of the United States. The Apostle Paul wants us to see it differently: **“Our citizenship is in heaven.”**

It amazes me how many people come every Ash Wednesday, and solemnly have ashes smeared on their foreheads, hearing these somber words: **“Remember, you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”** It’s done every year. If we unpack that, it means we don’t really belong here. We’re aliens, foreigners.

Folks come by the hundreds, in order to hear those words and get the ashes. Lent shakes us to remember our true destiny.

Last month, on my trip, I was able to travel through the Panama Canal, that amazing engineering feat which linked an easy passage from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. At the start of last century, our nation’s 26th president Theodore Roosevelt presided over the White House from 1901-09. In 1906, he was the first president to travel abroad, visiting the Panama Canal under construction. There’s a photograph of President Theodore Roosevelt proudly sitting atop one of the big dirt movers in the Panama Canal construction effort.

A year after Roosevelt left office in 1909, he made a long hunting trip to Africa. The famous Scripture scholar Joachim Jeremias, from the University of Chicago, related an incident about the Roosevelt mystique. Professor Jeremias told the true story that a colleague of his returned to the States after 7 years of missionary work in Equatorial Africa. This Protestant missionary and his wife traveled by boat

across the Atlantic, and happened to be passengers on the same ship which carried President Roosevelt back to the States after he had made a cruise to Africa. When the ship arrived in the New York harbor, the missionary and his wife were awestruck at the pageantry and majestic welcome afforded President Roosevelt as he disembarked. Bands played, confetti floated through the air, dignitaries applauded.

After 7 years of missionary work in Africa, no one greeted this couple upon their return.

Days later, the missionary's wife noticed an uncommon silence in her husband. He was sullen, depressed, distant. Finally she asked him to talk about what was angering him. The missionary blurted out his frustration: "We sacrificed 7 years of our life in a distant land; we worked hard. Then we end up on the same boat with that Roosevelt. He gets home after a holiday, and soaked in all those accolades. We get home, and no one even greets us and acknowledges our work."

His wife paused, then punctured the bubbling hostility of her husband with the terse comment: "**We're not home yet.**"

Sisters and brothers: Lent shakes us to regain our true perspective on life. "**Our citizenship is in heaven.**" In other words, *we're not home yet*. Paul then reminded the church in Philippi. "**For many,**" he warns them, "**their minds are occupied with earthly things.**" Can it be so? Driven by our goals, we live as if *this* is our home, and that our bodies will not end up as dust. We get obsessed with secondary concerns.

Impolitely, almost in tacky fashion, Lent jars us to re-focus, and see clearly. "**Our citizenship is in heaven.**" The Apostle Paul then goes on to assure us of the true promise of our citizenship: "**The Lord Jesus Christ will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body.**" A promise and a pledge, as long as we remain loyal to our citizenship.

Each of us, all of us—Ask the questions: *By what right have secondary concerns become so important? Do we live as though this is home, rather than "our citizenship in heaven"?* Lent calls us to keep in focus—"We're not home yet."

## *General Intercessions*

*March 17, 2019*

*Second Sunday of Lent*

*(for the 8:30 a.m. and 5:15 p.m. Masses only--)*

**Deepen our closeness to Jesus in his dying and rising, that we might live truly knowing that “our citizenship is in heaven”; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**On this memorial of St. Patrick, bring joy to our parish as we celebrate our feast day, that we might grow in our faith and proclaim the Gospel by our word and example; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Empower our newly-appointed Bishop of Memphis, David Talley, to lead wisely, to serve humbly, and to enlist us to join with him in crafting our future boldly; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Strengthen our six teenagers who celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation today, that they may bear witness to Jesus each day by their way of life; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Convert our hearts from all bigotry and discrimination due to race, gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Embrace with your love all who have died with hope, especially Karen Silverstein, Helen Patterson, and all those killed in the New Zealand mosque massacre; we pray to you, O Lord—**

