
Lifted Up By Jesus: A Tribute to Elizabeth Adair O’Gorman

**A homily at the funeral of Elizabeth Adair O’Gorman
by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell**

My favorite preschool teacher once explained to me that if she wanted to teach a child to draw a tree, she did not give her a picture and tell her to copy it. She showed her a tree and invited her to draw what she saw. Do you see the difference? If she had simply copied some picture or image of a tree, it would've been somebody else's work, there's no creation there. And when you looked at the finished product, you wouldn't notice anything except what was wrong, what didn't conform, what didn't fit the image that was to be copied. The real generative work, the creative work, is seeing what you see in the tree. Everybody sees something different, different colors, different motion, different tonal character. That's creative work that brings the child alive, and it brings you alive too when you see the joy that the creative act has generated.

Now, I know you think this is just another clever principle from Reggio, but actually it's the same principle that Vincent van Gogh, the nineteenth-century post-impressionist painter, followed. He was beginning to do his work in an age when a new technology had emerged: photography. So while everybody else around him was focused on capturing what they thought was the precise, exact, correct, true form, he was doing things like painting starry night with vivid swirling images and stars of different colors, cypress trees that reached up to the sky. It was alive in a way that a picture could never be. It was more real than the reality of the photography because it was a creative, generative act. God, if you will, was more present in Starry Night than he was in a photograph.

Now I think about Starry Night and its attraction when I think about Adair, because what Adair did of course, was show us what she saw, what she felt, the different tonal quality than we saw, colors maybe we had not imagined. Who knew a bump in a road was that much fun? And what happened when we saw the picture of life that she was creating, the book of life that she was writing, we came alive. We saw her vulnerability, and it reminded us of our own. And you know what? There's no intimacy without vulnerability.

So while we are spending our lives trying to curate the perfect image so others will love the person we want to be, Adair is being herself, all of it, all the time. The hard parts, the fun parts, the tears, the cries of joy, Adair was being herself all the time. And as she was being herself, she was showing us how to be ourselves too. That's why we loved her. That's why we felt more alive when we were around her. That's why preachers can't carry on with wedding ceremonies when she comes in because she changes what we see, she changes the picture that we see in front of us for the better.

Now, it is Easter season and our Christian faith is that every human being matters. And that's not just a moral precept because it's good and nice, that's because without the contribution, the perception of every human being, none of us are whole. We are not really a person unless we are in connection with, in relationship with, open to, and learning from everybody else. Each of us when we are born has a purpose. We spend our lives trying to figure out what that purpose may be. I think Adair may have gotten it a little bit quicker than the rest of us.

We saw her vulnerability, it reminded us of our own. We saw her courage and it gave some we didn't have. We saw her joy and we thought, why not blow a kiss from the lectern? Why not laugh as you go over a bump in the road? Why not try when you have no idea how it's going to turn out? Adair had a purpose. I think she fulfilled that purpose. If you look around and see everybody here, I think you can agree with me. We are all a little bit more alive, we have drawn closer to God because we knew her or those who loved her, and we are better for it.

You remember that story in the Bible when as the crowd presses around Jesus wanting to know how to get into

heaven, thinking, "I'm sure that there's a trick, there's some rules to be followed, there's some precise manner in which to behave," what does he do? He asks for a child and he holds up the child for all to see, and he says, "You must become like this child in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven." In my image, that child was Adair. She was showing us what Jesus wants us to know, how to be fully, wholly alive, how to really be ourselves, how to laugh and cry through everything that life presents us, seeing the life in it for what it really is, how to look at Starry Night and never see the night sky the same again. That's her gift, and thanks to those who allowed that gift to be given. Amen.

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