

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2020A

Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

The *Transformer* movie franchise has been a huge financial success.

The movies have been a hit. The first three in the series grossed more than 3 billion dollars in worldwide box office revenue. All this despite the fact that it tells the tale of a deeply sad and scary world, a world where enemies attack, where death looms and where the fabric of civilization has been torn apart. It tells the story of a life marked by fear. Think about it. At any moment you could be minding your own business, and then, out of nowhere, "ZAP!" an automobile shoots you with a laser.

What if someone told you that there are many people who view life as a Christian the same way? No, they don't think that following Jesus invites attack from alien transformers. But there are many, far too many, who believe that following Jesus is a sad and scary thing. People who, at the very least, see life **with Jesus** as no less fear-filled, no more peace-filled and not tangibly different than life **without Jesus**.

For them being baptized into Christ hasn't resulted in freedom from the very real sadness, uncertainty or perpetual and personal brokenness that accompanies life in our world. For them, the plot remains the same. Their life feels far from transformed.

But what we see in today's text is that it doesn't have to feel that way. In fact, the apostle Paul goes out of his way to make sure his readers, that we, understand that life in Christ is, in fact, different. We may not "feel" it all the time, but a transformation **has** taken place. He writes, "... we know that our

old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin ... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ" (vv. 6, 11).

You're a transformer. We're transformed. No, we are not robots. We're also not whatever it is our parents, our peers or that little voice inside of us says we are. We're baptized children of God. In that moment of baptism, although it seems so insignificant, Paul reminds us that a full-scale transformation was solemnized. In fact, he says that in our baptisms God publicly, officially announced us as connected to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus -- along with all of its effects. God stirred in us a faith that laid hold of the baptismal promise that says, "My sinful self died with Christ on the cross. My broken, dying and condemned flesh was buried with him in the tomb, and I rose with him on Easter whole, righteous, eternal, free and beloved. I am transformed."

If you're a baptized follower of Jesus Christ, the truth is that, regardless of what you feel today, you live in a new reality, a new age today. Now. You're spiritually, inwardly resurrected now and will be physically and fully transformed at Christ's return tomorrow. That is your reality. The key, as Paul encourages, is to remember that this is our reality. We are dead to sin and alive in Christ.

So, what is it that's so different about us now? At least when the cars transform you can quite clearly see their doors turn into awesome guns and crazy robot faces emerge from underneath their hoods. So, what do we have?

Well, much could be said but for starters we now live resurrected from servitude -- slavery to sin and death. Prior to our connection to Christ, sin and death owned us. They owned

us like the Transformers owned earth: wreaking havoc and robbing us of hope. Prior to being connected to Christ all we could do was sin. Even our best efforts were marred by the fact that we were far from God. And all we had to look forward to was death. Our body aged and decayed as a constant reminder that one day our imperfection would get the one thing it deserved: a burial.

But now that we've been resurrected, we've been filled with the Holy Spirit and have the strength to choose different, live different, be different. No, we won't be able to do so all the time, perhaps not even most of the time. But here's the good news: God sees us not in light of our sin but in light of our resurrection. So even now, when we screw up, God looks at us and sees a son or a daughter, rather than a sin-stained zombie. God's not lurking around the corner waiting to zap us, waiting to crush us. God already denounced our sinful selves in the waters of baptism.

What else is different? Well, we're also resurrected out of shame and fear. For people who are resurrected -- who have been made new in Jesus Christ -- chances are we spend far too much time looking backward. Resurrected people look forward. Dwelling on our pre-resurrected past invites shame over our sin and fear of punishment.

Now, yes, if there's something that we've done that doesn't jibe with our transformation, we should confess it, turn from it and throw it into the tomb with Christ. Call it out as not belonging in your life today and kick it to the curb, giving thanks for the forgiveness and newness that is yours in Jesus.

But don't be crushed in shame. Don't live in fear of rejection. God has made clear, in your baptism, how God feels about us. We're new. We're loved. Live as such. And when we forget just

who we are, let us return to that promise, pick ourselves up and move forward.

Let's be honest, this is easier said than done. Though we're transformed, the truth is that we will be, until the return of Christ, *simul justus et peccator*, i. e., at once a saint and a sinner. Johnny Cash captures this vividly in his song, "The Beast in Me." "Sometimes it tries to kid me that it's just a teddy bear, or even somehow managed to vanish in the air. And that is when I must beware. But everybody knows, they've seen him out dressed in my clothes. God help the beast in me." But the promise of our baptism is that this beast, this sinner that remains, is not all that we are. It's not all that remains. We're now in the eyes of God something wholly different, and empowered by God's spirit to live that way.

Perhaps what we need to do is surround ourselves with a few more transformed people, members of God's resurrected community who can actively remind us who we are. How about this: it's easier than ever to allow God's word -- which actively presses our beast back into the tomb and stirs up our resurrected reality -- to fill our hearts and minds and ears. Now is an excellent time to spend some time with your bible and do some spiritual reading.

It sounds fantastic and unbelievable. We may not feel it. But we live in a new age. We live in a resurrected reality. If we allow this truth to hit us, we would be overwhelmed by it. Imagine there was a doctor somewhere who understood the art of saving people from death or, even though they died, could restore them quickly to life so that they would afterward live forever. Oh, how the world would pour in money like snow and rain. The world isn't yet lining up in droves to receive this transformation. But God is, in Christ, doing just such saving, restoring and transforming. And God has done this for us and to us.

We can live free from sin. We can choose today, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of our baptism to be the man or woman that we admire, that the world needs and that God says we are. Let us live free from shame and fear. Seek obedience. Pursue adventure. Have fun. Move forward. You are new. As in the *Transformer* films, we live in a messed-up world. But we are not a messed-up people. We're not headed for extinction. We're not stuck in sin. We are transformed. We are resurrected. Let us live that way. Amen.

Deacon Gerry

