

LIFE IS CABARET

A Daily Office Witness

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I have ascertained that life is Cabaret, that life is dance. I want to talk to you about a Cabaret that I discovered recently when I was visiting in New Orleans. I went to a Cabaret that wasn't a Cabaret self-consciously. It was really only a grill, self-consciously, but it was a Cabaret.

This was a grill, just an ordinary grill, the kind that serves milk shakes and hamburgers, but it was a special grill that had decided to be something else. To mention the outside of it first of all, here was a tiny building shaped like a small plantation. When you went inside, it was still just an ordinary grill, the kind that serves hamburgers and French fries and milk shakes. You open the door and there was a counter with stools, just like an ordinary grill, but behind the grill the waiters are dressed in formal coats and bow ties. When they bring the hamburgers out, they bring them on expensive China. They put a white linen tablecloth on the counter in front of you and serve you with sterling silver. I mean this goes on day after day.

I remember also Joe. Joe is just an ordinary waiter, not good-looking. In fact, when you look at Joe his face is too big, his head is too large and his teeth are snaggle-toothed. He looks kind of like a benign vampire. When my mother-in-law was having trouble ordering, he came up to her, and she acted startled. And he says, "Whoops, I hope I didn't scare you. I know my face is frightening." And then she said, "Oh no, I just couldn't decide whether to have lemon meringue pie or pecan pie." And he said, "Oh, well, a quarter will take care of that. Heads, it's lemon meringue; and tails, it's pecan pie." So he took a quarter out and flipped it and decided that. Later he brought my wife a freeze and put two cherries on the top of it. My wife is pregnant. And he says, "That is just in case there are two of them."

He had taken that whole place, just an ordinary mundane situation in life and turned it into mystery. There was not any act that was too insignificant to give it style. Placing a coffee cup on a table was the occasion for giving it a spin. Throwing something in the trash can involved flinging up their fingers. Every single motion there was like a dance. This is a true story. For twenty minutes we couldn't stop talking about what had happened inside that little grill.

Wouldn't it be something if over the next twenty years we discover how it is that we can reveal to every man the life that is just present in life, reveal the dance that is just present in life, reveal to every man that life is Cabaret.