

MORE ON THE OOM (cont'd from p.2)

Dianne Aid

get a ticket is if a member of the society sold it to you. When you arrived, you would be asked to identify who sold you the ticket. You would be allowed in, but the person who sold you the ticket would receive a letter and a fine.” My friend thanked him for being honest. The waiter went on to say that it was tradition, and nobody wanted to change anything; neither Whites nor Blacks. It was another scene out of the movie.

The waiter commented that traditionally the Mayor of Mobile is invited to his mystic society ball and that this year he was surprised (or disappointed) that the current Mayor, who is Black, accepted the invitation because the invitation was merely offered as a social gesture and the society did not expect it would be accepted.

Due to travel delays, I did not leave Mobile until the following Tuesday. I spent Monday at the Mardi Gras Museum. True to "Mobile tradition", there was a White queen and king room and a Black queen and king room. The displays were from the 2007 Mardi Gras, so I was looking at the royal garb and pictures of the kings and queens from *The Order of Myths* movie. I struck up a conversation with the shop-keeper in the gift shop, a White woman, and loosely an Episcopalian. I asked her about the movie. She said it was pretty good, and her daughter was actually in *The Order of Myths* production. She, the shop-keeper, told me that she wishes they had not brought up the lynching - it had nothing to do with Mardi Gras. She went on to tell me about how much more violence there was in Black neighborhoods than in White neighborhoods.

I could go on with this story. I tried to reason with her to no avail. The conversation drifted

to the U.S. elections and that President Obama has opened new doors. She reached under the counter and pulled out a basket of Obama Mardi Gras beads. Needless to say, I brought several to take back to friends.

I held several conversations that day. Blacks and Whites alike acknowledged that Mardi Gras was not anywhere near becoming integrated, Whites say “it is tradition”, Blacks, “it is business as usual”.

I came back, rented the movie and showed it in our EFM group and we did a theological reflection on it. Surprise, surprise, the Church seems to fit the same pattern. I have to take off my rose tinted glasses.

Note below added by Nell B. Gibson and taken from an Editorial by Frances Coleman of the Mobile, Alabama, PRESS-REGISTER, August 3, 2008:

NOTE:

Each year Mobilians crown a white king and queen and a black king and queen of Mardi Gras. It has white mystic societies that have never included blacks among their members, and black mystic societies that have never included whites. Its white societies' dances and parade floats are for whites and its black societies' dances and parade floats are for blacks.



EUC members attending The Order of Myths Workshop
Photo courtesy: Jan Adams

THE CHURCH WILL REBUILD

(cont'd from p.2) Rabb

more than one person's rising from the grave but God's great revelation of hope. The church is by nature the community of new life, new hope and a new being. The Biblical revelation is of atonement, of bringing creation into order with God's will. From creation to the calling of Israel to the words of the prophets and most of all in Christ Jesus, the atoning work of God is being manifest. We need a wholesale rethinking of what are, in fact, God's plan and true hope that death cannot and will not triumph. Death is manifest in degradation, oppression and alienation. The church needs to reclaim the word hope. Hope is not optimism. Optimism carries no obligations. Optimism also does not recognize sin or offer any solution. Hope is anchored in the continued work of God reconciling all things to God's will. However only by clearly standing against sin and with the commands of our Lord can hope really be understood. Because Jesus Christ is raised we have hope and because Jesus Christ is Raised, Christ's people, the church, are called to be people of hope.

Urban ministry needs to be about the possible, about a full commitment to righting the wrongs and sins that cause poverty and injustice. It needs to be refocused from survival, which is not the message of the Resurrection, to what is possible. We, as the church, need to be faithful witnesses to the reality that in Christ Jesus there is always new life and new hope. Is this not the heart of our faith? A few years ago a leader in my diocese told me I ought to sell a large church with a small membership. He asked, "How many people are worshipping?" I told him the key is that thirty plus children are here each week and see (over)

THE CHURCH WILL REBUILD (cont'd) John Rabb

this place as an anchor and hope. Even if we change just one life, we have done the faithful thing. The church is still open and doing some very fine ministry.

Finally, for far too long churches, and not just in the city, act out of neediness. The need to keep going, pay bills, attract new members and in many cases to simply survive. It is time for the church to move from neediness to giftedness. This is part of how Jesus taught his disciples in regard to how they were to carry out their mission. Look carefully at Jesus' charge to the twelve and the seventy in Luke 9 and 10. He actually tells them not to take a lot for the journey but to "travel light." In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6: 25-34, Jesus says we are not to "be anxious" because our Heavenly Father knows what we need. These are but two of the Biblical accounts pointing to why we must enter our ministry not out of scarcity but out of abundance because it is the grace of God working in and through us that truly gives us what we need. The great challenge before the church and all of us is, can we learn to live truly dependent upon the grace of God? I have never seen a church that does not have gifts. In the diocese I serve a church small in numbers with lots of economic challenges that nevertheless saw fit to work with the neighboring Lutheran church to create a community center with Head Start, after school mentoring and parenting classes. Another church, also small in numbers, saw its way to have an arts program for children who have no opportunity to truly know beauty. I often believe we behave like the widow who in II Kings 4:1-7, complains to the

prophet Elisha that she has nothing and has even had to sell her sons to a creditor. Elisha asks her what she has and she says nothing. But he persists and finally she admits that she does have a small flask of oil and he persuades her to borrow barrels and start to pour the oil. In time she fills all the vessels, settles all her debts and redeems her sons. We, as the church, can be like the widow, persuaded we have little or nothing, and hold on tightly to what we have. But if we do as our Lord tells us, we will "pour from our flask of oil," and be amazed at how much God has given us.

We often forget what we do have, and do know, as the church. We are the largest provider of child care. We have a long tradition of serious community service. We have schools, clinics and direct service ministries. Too often we have looked elsewhere assuming that the city, state or federal government will help. Clearly we will not stop doing advocacy. But just as clearly we need to step forward with our gifts, even if they are small steps. How often does Jesus not note the mustard seed? When serving in Atlanta a colleague of mine in urban endeavors, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Roberts, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, would quote an African proverb; "When spider webs unite they tie up lions." If each community of faith would weave its web, in God's wondrous way they will unite with others.

The church will rebuild the city if we reclaim our Biblical mandate to serve, if we truly see that with the resurrection we are part of God's plan and if we can move from neediness to giftedness. We will rebuild the city not with a sudden change, but the changes we make will last. By embracing the Biblical vision and demands we move from reactive to proactive. We lead and do not wait for others. Advocacy and working to change political

and economic systems will remain. The church will be in a much better place for the changes to be closer to what is demanded in the reign of God. We will define ourselves in terms of what truly counts and have the courage of our faith and commitments. "The church will rebuild the city?" Audacious? No, it is what we are called to do. For in Christ Jesus all things are possible. Possible because what we are called to do is what God wills and is God's vision.

PURPOSE of the EUC

(continued from page 3)

communication and to assist persons and organizations in making connections with causes of mutual concern. Realizing that today's rural poor will become tomorrow's urban poor and that the lines of suburbanites are determined by cities, the Caucus works to include all populations in its commitment and advocacy.

The Episcopal Urban Caucus strives to model inclusiveness and to embody respect for every living person in its worship and programs. Beyond this, it is committed to more visible advocacy through its newsletter, *The Urban Networker*, and through occasional publications such as, [To Heal the Sin Sick Soul](#). The Caucus takes seriously its commitment to be an effective and proactive voice in the life of the Church and an ally with other progressive forces.