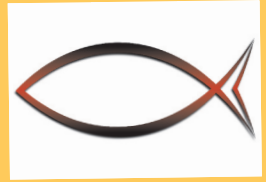




The Line

Convocation of the West



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Hello Brothers and Sisters

Our country is more divided now than I can ever remember in my lifetime. The need for constant prayer has never been greater. There is such power in prayer and it is so important for us to pray with each other. Prayer can unite us while hatred divides us. Why not ask someone to pray with you? Or offer to pray with someone else.



The Vicar's Venue

I must start this article with an apology. For the last several months, I have gone through a very dry spell. I have not felt inspired to write much of anything, and when I attempted to do so, it was flat. This may be because I have been reading quite a few books with “secular” subjects; or it may be that the Holy Spirit needed me to recharge my batteries. But the truth is that we must always wait on the Lord. Luckily, He sent me an inspiration recently.

Have you ever had a title of a book that seems to come up time and time again? Recently, I have seen and heard references to The Benedict Option by Rod Dreher. It is a thought provoking book and one that I would recommend every bishop, priest, deacon, vestry member, and parishioner to read. It would be a great book for a book club discussion as well. It has inspired me to write on several subjects.

As good as it is however, I have several bones of contention. The one I wish to address in this article is the fact that it falls into a sad dynamic, which is quite common for human kind. It





The Vicar's Venue (continued)

bewails the “good old days” when most people were Christian and attended church by the thousands. And one of the chief complaints I have read and heard is that Europe has become a wasteland where no one believes.

Now let us be clear, in Europe people do not attend church like they used to. This is a fact. In France where 90% of the people classify themselves as Catholic, only about 10% actually attend a church. In the city in France where I live part of the year, there are four churches. Only one is used each Sunday. In the summertime the parish uses St. Vorles, which is an old chapel that was part of a castle that was destroyed. It is smaller than the church that is usually used, St. Nicolas. Although the attendance is good on any given Sunday in this city, this still means that attendance is down by 50% to 75%. In other words, whereas in the past four churches were needed, now only one is needed.

However, after reading in Mr. Dreher's book the bemoaning of the loss of Christianity in Europe, the very next Sunday I attended a church service that was standing room only. It was not a feast day, but it was a special occasion. This particular Sunday, the girl scouts were attending the service. Now, in France, the scouts are strongly aligned to the Roman Catholic Church. I have seen boy scouts in Vézelay and other important Catholic Shrines, praying and making pilgrimages. The girl scouts attending last Sunday's service held up their flag throughout the service, which was a red cross with a gold fleur-de-lis in the center of the cross. Those who are familiar will know that the fleur-de-lis represents

the Blessed Trinity. The girls were in the choir seats behind the altar for the entire service.

As neat as this was, what impressed me was not just the sheer number of people who attended. On a “normal” Sunday, there are usually a few seats available. There were none this Sunday. Plus, there were the old and the young, and lots and lots of young families with many children. There were so many babies that sometimes the din of their cries drowned out the voice of the priest, who is quite soft-spoken. Some young people knelt on the hard stone floor during the consecration of the bread and wine. And all the people were highly respectful. But for me, the most inspiring part of this service was that all seemed to want to be there.

I know that sounds odd, but let's be honest. We priests have seen people in our churches who do not really want to be there. We have seen the families, especially at Christmas or at Easter time, where the elderly parent wants to go to church and the family goes along to satisfy the father or mother. Or we have seen the teenager who has decided he is too big to believe “such nonsense,” but goes because he or she is being forced. There is not a priest or deacon who cannot look out onto the congregation and see the person who really doesn't want to be there. Although my vantage point was not perfect, I honestly did not see this, especially in the young people.

As a matter of fact, I had the pleasure of sitting next to a young man. He was either in his late teens or early twenties (I have reached that age



The Vicar's Venue (continued)

that I can no longer tell the age of young people!). He impressed me deeply by his reverence. And although I did not expect him to be devout when he first took his seat next to me, he proved me absolutely wrong. What a joy to be proven cynical and wrong!

The truth is that in the good old days, many people attended church even though they did not want to be there. Some attended because it was what was expected. Some attended because it was good for business. Some attended because it was politically important. And some attended because it served some other purpose than to worship God. But now in Europe, there is no such dynamic. No one is forced to attend - not really. There is no real social pressure in Europe to attend church. This means that those in church really believe and really want to be there. Is that such a bad thing?

I remember this one gentleman who would worship with us at St. Luke's. He lived in and was a citizen of Switzerland. There he worshipped in an Anglican Church, which was filled with ex-pats from Britain. He was, and probably still is, a firm believer. But whenever he was in the US for business, he would come to our services. His faith was so strong that he made it a point to worship with us on the Sundays when he was in the US – even though he could have easily blown it off.

I would ask all of you not to write off Europe. Yes, less people than ever are worshipping the Lord in the churches in Europe. But no, the faith is far from dead. And what we should be

excited about is that the people who are there really want to be there. The young and the old, the families and the single – they are all truly in love with the Lord, and we do them a great disservice if we write them off just because they are in Europe.

Sometimes we Americans like to paint pictures with wide brushstrokes. It can be accurate in a general sense, but it lacks all nuance. When we generalize like this, we obliterate the subtle. We obliterate the silent. We obliterate the understated. And we obliterate the truth. The truth is that yes, there are less people in the pews, but no, Christianity is far from dead in Europe. If anything, there is a resurgence of faith that can only be attributed to the Holy Spirit.

And this is my point. We are not Pelagians. We do not believe that we can earn our own salvation by our actions. We can only be saved by Christ. This means that although we are to preach the Gospel of Christ, we are not responsible for anyone's conversion. That is solely in the hands of the Holy Spirit. To write off a people because of a perception, no matter how right or wrong, comes dangerously close to blaspheming the Holy Spirit:

“And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.” (Luke 12:10 KJV)

All things are possible for God. And all things are in God's hand. The Holy Spirit is alive and well in Europe. And He is alive and well in the



The Vicar's Venue (continued)

United States as well. We need to trust Him. And we need to realize that bemoaning things may lead to despair. And despair kills faith. Despair only perpetuates if we believe that God is not in control and that God is powerless to change things. This is wrong. Stop looking at the empty chairs, saying to yourself, "Where are the people?" Start looking at the people who inhabit the other chairs. Start looking at the Light in their eyes. See their love of God and in His Son. And start catching the fire of the Holy Spirit so that we too can be lights to the nation. And remember, with God, all things are possible! Amen.

The Rev. Cannon Michael Penfield
 Vicar-General of the ACW



Parish News

The Old Testament Prophets

(Last in a series of short articles intended to stimulate interest in studying the writings of the prophets)

Corinthians 15:3-4 Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

Paul's declaration that Jesus died and was raised

in accordance with the scriptures is an affirmation of his faith and a challenge for Christians to strengthen their faith by studying Old Testament text to learn how this is so (Amos 3:7; Acts 17:11).

I remember looking to the margin of my study Bible when I first read verses 3 and 4, seeking the supporting references. There were several, but only one from Hebrew Scripture (Isaiah 53:5-12). It is a massively important reference worthy of study, but there are many others in the writings of the prophets and the psalmists.

In fact, biblical scholars point to more than 400 Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ's coming and Passion. There is at least one in each of the 39 books, some clearly predictive and others appearing as similitudes or patterns that find their fullest expression in Jesus. Dozens are in the Book of Psalms, the book Jesus quoted most during His ministry.

This past Easter you heard again that Jesus recited the first verse of Psalm 22 from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Traditionally, the Jewish people understood this psalm was speaking of Israel's suffering, the "me" that was abandoned.

Jesus was telling those gathered near the cross that He, not Israel, was the focus, and they were witnessing the fulfillment of prophecy that day.

Some Christians wrongly think Jesus was pleading with the Father for relief from suffering. Instead, He was confirming, "the proud shall bow down



Parish News (continued)

to Him, all they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him.”

Faithful Jews knew the psalms by heart. It was customary for a priest in the Temple to intone only the beginning of a psalm, causing temple worshippers to recite or sing the remaining verses. By reciting the beginning phrase of Psalm 22, Jesus was calling attention to the remaining verses concerned with the coming Kingdom.

Psalm 22:1, 15-19, 27-31

1 My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

15 My strength is dried up like a potshard; and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. 16 Yea, dogs (metaphor) surround me: The assembly of the wicked encircles me: They pierced my hands and my feet. 17 I can count all my bones: They stare and gloat over me. 18 They divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots. 19 Be not far from me, O Lord: O my strength, come quickly to me.

27 All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before Him. 28 For the kingdom is the Lord's: And He is the governor among the nations. 29 All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him: and none can keep alive his own soul. 30 Prosperity shall serve Him; men shall tell of the Lord to the coming generation, 31 and they shall proclaim His righteousness to a people yet unborn (Gentiles), that He has done this.

Anyone doubting the supernatural nature of Scripture should consider that crucifixion was first employed by the Persians ca. 520 BC, yet it is vividly described in Psalm 22, written during the reign of King David (1011 BC-971BC) 1,000 years before Jesus was nailed to a cross of wood.

Those interested in knowing what lies ahead for mankind should consider the words of Amos: *“Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He reveals His secrets unto His servants the prophets.”* (Amos 3:7)

David Cole



Parish News (continued)

We're all feeling it, the dog days of summer, the hottest and most uncomfortable days of the year. Temperatures consistently over 90 degrees are historically associated with the rise of the bright star Sirius, the Dog Star that Greek and Roman astrologers associated with heat, drought, thunderstorms, lethargy, mad dogs and bad luck - not sure about mad dogs and bad luck. Depending on location, dates vary from July to early September. Undeterred by hot sultry weather, the 1552 Book of Common Prayer



Parish News (continued)

appointed July 7 through September 5 as Dog Days. This is the period the Church celebrates several important feasts, among which are: Mary Magdalene, “the apostle to the apostles,” because she was the first witness of the resurrection; St. James the Greater, the patron saint of Spain and the first Apostle to be martyred; and the Transfiguration of our Lord.

As the dog days of summer linger, summer fun fades, as it inevitably will, and we discover ourselves easily transitioning from rest and play back to the serious business of school and work - anything to distract from the heat. However, all this is sweetened by the promise of fall. Question: What do fall, back to school and back to work have in common? Answer: a new start. And who doesn't like new? New pencils, new shoes, a new briefcase....

The Preacher says there is nothing “new” under the sun. (Ecc 1:9). He knows because he has seen and done it all. To be clear, he is not referring to innovations and advances in mathematics, mechanisms and technology. He is referring to “the natural order of things that remain the same as ever before: the powers of nature and the links of natural causes; the condition of men's hearts, their desires, pursuits and complaints.” (Henry)

The Preacher also says “for everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” (Ecc 3:1) Take for example, “a time to plant, and a time to harvest what is planted.” This may be a curious time of year to talk about planting, but it is never too late to plant seeds

of change and renewal. Anticipating a new business or academic year or any other endeavor, it is natural to investigate ways to improve on what has gone before. Of course sprucing things up with new supplies and equipment excites and invigorates. However, new is one thing, but its partner renewal is quite another. New is the quick fix. Renewal is the long-haul. Generally speaking, to restore, rebuild and remake is neither easy nor fun, but the benefits are long lasting and the harvest most likely eternal.

Therefore, as the dog days of summer come to their end, let us embrace the opportunity to do a new thing, again. And, in whatever form that may take, be it a small thing or a great undertaking, personal or corporate, remember to first seek discernment and wisdom and then the grace to bring it to completion.

Father Don Hughes

St John's Anglican Church



Parish News (continued)

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
I have edited and written a small personal devotional. It has been a labor of love, and ever so slow to develop. My friend and spiritual



Parish News (continued)

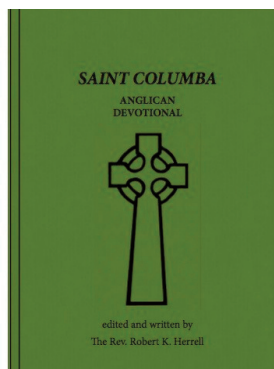
advisor, The Rt. Rev. Winfield Mott, has encouraged me to get it done (+Win wrote the forward, and said what I couldn't). At a rate of about two pages a year, lol, this 80 page devotional is out and available.

I have had various little devotionals in my walk with Christ. This one is what I have learned from other brilliant believers in their writing and leading. I use it. It keeps me on track. I hope it will find a place with others, with you.

I will be using the funds from sales to help the Anglican clergy in the wilderness of the Northwest. Because of rental space, Sunday service, weekday services and Morning and Evening prayer are very hard to observe as the gathered Body of Christ. With the funds raised, all will be donated to rent or to provide a space so we may observe the calendar of the Church.

Yes, it may seem a bit Anglo-Catholic to some. In my experience, I believe it to be the middle way in our worshipping body. I hope it captures that which needs to be maintained in our faith for the individual believer.

In Christ,
The Rev. Robert K. Herrell



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Hint of Humor



Parting Words

