

March 2020

Volume VII ,Number 2

# THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West  
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS



Photo by Guillaume Vachey

## From the Desk of the Vicar-General

By Fr. Michael Penfield

Last Christmas, I visited Amsterdam. I had never been; and so I booked a bed and breakfast in the center of town, as I usually do when visiting a city for the first time. But, this time, I was in for a rude awakening.

My bed and breakfast was in the heart of the most touristy section, and one block from the red-light district. Besides the sex shops almost everywhere you looked, there was also the pungent smell of pot wafting out of each and every coffee shop. Needless to say, it did not fill me with the warm feeling of Christmas. But, I am a bit of a mystic and often believe that these things happen for a reason. The question for me, however, was what was the reason? Why did God want me to be surrounded by these things?

Well, the first thing I noticed was that there were a lot of tourists in the area I was staying in, and not too many Dutch. Surprisingly, there were many people from the Middle East and many young Muslims.

I say surprising because Muslim countries are very strict about these kinds of things. However, not too surprising was that there were also a lot of young Europeans as well. My guess is that both groups decided to have a wild time during their Christmas vacation.

But, outside of this tourist area, I saw more and more of the Dutch, and this was interesting as well. On the street, they seemed to be some of the most unfriendly people I have ever met. But in restaurants, pubs, and shops, they were wonderfully friendly. I had some great conversations and enjoyable moments talking with these people. But it puzzled me for a time why they were so unfriendly on the streets. My guess now is that it is a form of self-defense – protection, as it were, from the craziness that infests some of the neighborhoods of Amsterdam.

It was on the 23rd of December, my first night in Amsterdam, that I got lost and ended up in the red-light district. I am not a prude, and I have seen

### Our Core Value is:

*“The Convocation of the West is Missionary, bringing people to Christ and meaningfully engaging in the transformation of the culture around us.”*



### The Vision of the Convocation is:

*“To STRENGTHEN existing churches;  
To PLANT new churches; and  
To RAISE UP missional leaders.”*

many things, but nothing compares with the women who were on display in the windows of the local brothels. I think every priest should see this. I had heard of this but had no interest in seeing it, especially just before Christmas. Yet, by accident or by divine design, I did. Quite frankly, it shocked me. These were beautiful women, acting out what they thought was a tempting fantasy, to entice men to partake. I think the fact that these women were so beautiful was the most shocking part of this revelation. But, it was sordid in so many ways that it took time for me to process it.

In this same district, which is the oldest in Amsterdam, two of the oldest churches resides. One is a Protestant church; the other is the Roman Catholic, which is named Saint Nicholas. It is in Saint Nicholas on the 26th that I was hit with the ultimate juxtaposition. Saint Nicholas is on the outskirts of the red-light district. When I walked in that evening, the nuns from a local convent were chanting the Gregorian Mass. Their voices were heavenly. And here I think is the message.

The puritanical have it wrong. God created a beautiful world with lots of pleasurable things about it. The warmth of the sun on our faces, the delight in a wonderful meal, the joy of friends and family, and the pleasure of love are all gifts from God. But, we disobeyed God. And with our sin and our fall came the fall of all creation with us. Anything good can be corrupted; anything beautiful can be made hideous. And that is what I saw.

These poor women who are employed in the red-light district and the men who made it all legal may think it is a victimless crime, but that is a lie. Both the men and women involved are victims. Both those who live in this environment and those who come to explore it are victims. And the result is that those things that God had given us for our pleasure and enjoyment have been corrupted to the point where they are no longer pleasant or enjoyable. It is a great sin.

The Dutch who live in the city must retreat within

themselves to escape what is outside of them. It is self-defense. And those who come may, at first, relish the abandonment, but, if they are worth their salt, they will soon realize how empty this all is.

Now, before I leave Amsterdam, let me say that it is a beautiful city that I would highly recommend to explore it as well. The Resistance Museum in the old Jewish Quarter and Ann Frank's House were very powerful. I also visited the second oldest Synagogue in all of Europe. It is called the Portuguese

Synagogue and is so old it has no heat and no electricity. The massive brass chandeliers with candles provide light. And the art museums were tremendous. Above all, I must say that the Dutch were incredibly warm and friendly people, but not on the streets!

God is quite wonderful. He has given us a world to take care of and to enjoy. He has filled it with beautiful and good things. And it gives Him great joy when we appreciate these things and enjoy them.

Appreciating a beautiful day or a beautiful woman is not a sin. Having a great meal with a delicious bottle

of wine is not a sin. And having a great evening, laughing and talking with friends is not a sin. God wants us to enjoy what He has given us, but we must also be careful. We must guard against the corrupting effect of our fallen nature and how evil likes to corrupt that which is rooted in the good. And I think most of us instinctively know when we are enjoying the gifts of God properly and when we are "taking it too far" or "debasement the good". As Saint Paul has told us, nothing we do will be perfectly pure. There will always be an evil thought that will corrupt what we do. Nothing will be perfectly pure until the Resurrection. But until then, it is our duty to point out to others the great gifts that God has given us, and to appreciate those gifts properly and joyously.

Amen.

Photo by Ricardo Tulio Gandelman  
Inside Amsterdam's Portuguese Synagogue



# The Calm Sea

By Fr. Jonah Kelman

*“We put not our trust in anything we do”*

A homily from Clericus in Mesilla, NM • Readings: Genesis 49, Psalm 119:89-104, Matthew 7

Matthew 7 is not simple. The Sermon on the Mount is not simple, even if the thoughts are concise. Those who preached from Matthew 5 this last Sunday know this too well. As I was praying and thinking of how to approach these texts, the close of the Sermon on the Mount stayed with me, and our collect for Sexagesima formed my thought as we prepare for Lent:

*O Lord God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do: Mercifully grant that by thy power we may be defended against all adversity.*

With the collect for the week in mind, I would like to consider the verses 24-27 of Matthew 7:

*“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”*

We have two houses: one on a foundation of sand, and one on a foundation of rock.

Then we have a storm: rain, floods, and wind.

One house does not fall, because of the rock foundation, and the other, “when the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall”

What is the rain? These are all of the misfortunes of life that come from outside of us: lost jobs, financial setbacks, a bad fall, a health crisis, a broken relationship, a lost loved one, a car crash, a dysfunctional church, and all such external circumstances. All of these are unavoidable regardless of who you are.

*For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:45)*

What is the house? This is our self. This is who we are in the process of constructing because of the words of Christ—the Sermon on the Mount specifically.

There is no ‘unchurched’ mentioned here. We only have people who have heard the words of Christ. These words present us our internal reality, irrespective of the storm: that adultery isn’t just an action but an attitude of the heart, that not everyone who does great works in His name – and here I would include evangelism and discipleship – is actually in a real participatory relationship with Christ. This house is our self and all the work we put into who we are. It is our safety and security.

What is the rock? This feels straightforward, for verse 29

answers it: the rock is the authority of Christ as Sovereign. Psalm 119 praises this: His word is firmly fixed in the heavens (verse 89), exceeds all of our concepts of perfection (96), is our source of wisdom (verses 98-100), and reveals reality such that we know what to hate (104). To be connected to—to be built on—this rock is to have an authentic relationship with Christ. We see what such relationship looks like through the preceding verses and chapters.

What is the sand?

This one was interesting:

Jesus is preaching near the Sea of Galilee. From one commentary I consulted, I learned that in this area, the temptation to build on sand was not as far-fetched as one might think.

This region has a top layer of alluvial sand, which is hard on the surface during the summer. When winter rain came, the Jordan River would cause the banks on the Sea of Galilee to overflow, and so soften the hard top layer near the banks of the sea.

To find the foundation in this setting, a builder would have to dig sometimes ten feet down to get to the bedrock, but such planning would make any structure resistant to this flooding.

In our hypothetical, we have two neighbors who are building in the same vicinity. Both want to construct a structure. They might even have the same architecturally approved plans for the house (if we can correlate such to the Words of Christ). One wants results now, perhaps because of his own seed falling on rocky soil (Mt 13:5), or because of the anxiety for want of things houses usually provide: *comfort* and *security*. So he finds a place that looks good enough, on ground that appears hard enough, and gets started. *There’s a chance it’ll be OK.*

The other, however, also wants the same house, and in a similar location. But this builder does not want to leave things to ‘good enough’ or to chance that it may be OK.

The structure, if it should stand, should stand for a long time. So he does the necessary excavation, even though it may push building into seasons more inclement. No doubt his neighbor with the head start will already be comfortable, when he might still be working.

I submit that the sand here is the unrighteousness of the soul, which is our predilection towards disobedience.

Excavating this is hard work, and often feels like there is plenty in life—especially in religious life—that is good enough to get the job done. It doesn’t always hold up when the world around us is a flood.

It is possible—and therefore tempting—to jump in front of

the line and get to the 'good stuff' of prophesying, healing, and many great works in the name of Jesus, but what is done in his name is very often not what his words actually say. Proof of this is everywhere, whether politics or denominations.

Following Jesus' commands—obeying his words—is more than doing what we think is best, or even what Jesus does: it is doing what Jesus would have us do.

Like digging for bedrock, much of this is not glamorous work. Daily lives of prayer, ascetical disciplines, and unskilled worship is part of it. But it is also kindness towards others, especially those with whom we might disagree; generosity towards others, especially those from whom there may not be any gain.

When the world around us says to us *"you are my enemy,"* we should join with the early church and say, *"you are my neighbor."*

This is a more significant movement of the heart than any prophecy, and the growth of the early church attests to this model: bless those who curse you. The church grows from a few thousand to a few million. It also attests to the risks of such behavior: it grew through continual testing of this strategy, to the point of martyrdom.

But these words of Christ are the stuff of eternity; even if heaven and earth pass away, our foundation, if we build on such, is one that withstands even that. This is the reality of our selves revealed by obedience to Christ.

What we gain in this foundation is eternal security.

Now I don't mean 'eternal security' in a Calvinistic sense, but a security amidst storms that has eternal scope.

St John Chrysostom writes on this passage that one who pursues this foundation can have stability and equilibrium that, in such a storm, one of the kingdom experiences instead a 'calm sea.'

Friends, the storm comes to us all, the just and the unjust; and it manifests in many different ways. But the words of

Christ encourage us that our hard work is not in vain if we are anchoring our reality—our identity—in Him.

From all of this, what I found most challenging was this:

1. Do not lose heart. Good faithful, work yields its benefit best under testing, and that yield is seen only after the testing has finished.

2. This chastens my tendency towards comparison. We are all building our own house. Our passage, at verse 3, *"Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"*

And similarly in verse 20 *"by their fruits you shall know them."*

Applied towards ministry (which perhaps applies to our churches, or our diocese just as well) I ought not look to whomever I think is living their 'best life now' but my own life and living vocation with the people the Lord has placed in my life. One church may be built on sand, and another on a foundation of rock, but only the Lord knows on what they have built, and the fruit only reveals itself when storms come.

Looking at our neighbor's house has nothing to do with what foundation—or lack thereof—we may have.

3. A good building inspection reveals that I have some sand. This is because I am—like all of us—a sinner with a predilection toward the same shortcuts as our ill-fated builder, whether in action or intention.

Internal renovation is the antidote to such illusory shortcuts.

We are in Ember week, and if any of my own disclosure resonates, I have good news: Lent week is a perfect time to embark on a remodel that will better connect our houses to the bedrock, which is Christ. Out of that fruit, we can be better followers of Christ, better friends, better pastors, and better churches, able to weather the disappointments and hardships of life with joy, as a 'calm sea.'

## Upcoming Synod

The Missionary Diocese of All Saints will be holding their 2020 Synod in Ocean City, Maryland March 26, 27 and 28. This is an extremely important Synod. We will be electing a new Bishop Coadjutor who will be leading MDAS after Bishop Ilgenfritz retires. Therefore, we need to see as many of you as we can!

Additionally, the Anglican Convocation of the West will be holding their Annual Meeting of the Convocation at the same time and the same location. Our meeting will be the morning of March 26. This means that those members of the Convocation who will be attending need to arrive by the evening of March 25.

We hope to see you all there!