



The Line

Diocese of the West



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Hello Brothers and Sisters in Christ

I pray this finds you all in good health. We have been experiencing horrific fires here in the west. Just this weekend, a new fire started in the Clear Lake region of northern California. In just hours, almost an entire town was destroyed. This is just one of the fires, and some have been burning for weeks. We all need to be praying for those who have lost everything, and for the many firefighters who have been out there working so hard to contain these fires. These men and women give their all, and deserve our heartfelt appreciation for all they do.



Thank You

The Bishop's Corner

Sacred Space

Is nothing sacred?

It's an old question, often meant rhetorically. As the pillars of Christendom continue to fall in the society around us, and the formerly familiar patterns interweaving Christian Faith into our culture twist instead into making us a counter-culture minority, always out of step with the "Zeitgeist," often misunderstood, sometimes persecuted (generally in subtle and mental rather than physical ways), and frequently simply excluded and ignored in the public forum, it would appear much less is sacred than in the recent past.

But the greatest danger from our society is not a frontal assault on Christianity, but rather the infiltration of its concepts and norms into the Christian community itself. "We have met the enemy and they are us," to quote Pogo. Frequently I meet those who we often would call "the children of this world." Rarely do I sense hostility. Mostly, I feel pity for them, as they typically yearn for spiritual fulfillment but often cannot find it, and usually do not even know where to look. Every sick movement from

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Scientology to ISIS harvests its share of these bewildered seekers.

And “The Church?” The message is muddled, not helped by media attention on the weird among us, but that is not really much of an excuse. The basic fact is that Christian people themselves often have a muddled understanding of the Gospel. It is the genius of the present Pope to be one of the few to both be able to cut through the fog with at least snippets of the Gospel, and to have the “bully pulpit” to access the attention of the world. Although he has yet to utter one word of heresy, it is telling that it is often Christians who are scandalized by him, not the secular.

So we Christians need to regroup. Before we can share the Gospel, we have to be clear on it. Christian formation has not been very powerful among us. As I travel the Diocese, I do not observe much learning taking place. It is not enough to simply cling to a past. I say this as someone whose other academic training (other than theology) is history. I love, respect, and learn from history, as should we all. But history, as life, is dynamic not static. If we want to do a re-enactment of the 1950's, 1928, 1549 or 325, it has its value and can be fun. But Sunday and the encounter with the living Lord in the Eucharist is not the time. We are called to learn from the past, to receive the “paradosis,” the precious message of Faith passed to us. But we are called to apply it and live it, not box it up, preserve and isolate it. The Lord cannot be contained. The Liturgy is action, which begins but does not end, on Sunday.

Ask yourself, how is my Christian formation coming? Am I clear on the Gospel and its meaning for my life? Are the people around me in my parish clear on this, and if not, what am I going to do to fix that? If the children of this world cannot get a clear message from Christians on what the Gospel is, that is a sad situation. Do I communicate in word and deed the love of God to all around me, and not just my “group?” Do I love myself enough to love my neighbor? If not, do I understand that if God can love me, knowing me and my failings better than even I know them, I surely can love myself, His creation.

As for what is sacred, we have been brainwashed by the Greek philosophers on that one. The literal answer is that nothing is the only thing which is not sacred. God created everything else out of nothing, out of primeval chaos (“tohu wa bohu”), and He saw it was good, every segment of it (read Genesis 1). We would divide the world into sacred places and secular ones. God does not. For instance, as the world reels and writhes over climate change, Christians have a special responsibility. We know, or should know, what the world does not. “This is our Father's world.” We humans have been delegated by God to run it, to be the stewards or managers of it, in compliance with his will for it. As best we can each find our own “bully pulpit,” we have the burden of sharing that prophetic knowledge, while there is still time.

Step one is to be clear on this yourself. Instead of being stewards, humans have indulged in a continuous orgy of violence and greed, destroying and exploiting each other and the whole creation.

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Not surprisingly, the consequences of that are now causing global catastrophic physical damage, and the catastrophic spiritual damage which is unseen, is far greater. If you think the Church's job is to snatch souls out of this, rather than be stewards of it; if you think the Church is called to focus on sexual sins; if you think the Church is supposed to withdraw from the public forum into a corner called "sacred space," and ignore all this; if you think all this is someone else's problem, or for the politicians to solve; —you need to re-orient yourself. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it," says the Psalmist (Ps. 24). Everything means everything.

And the Church isn't Pope, hierarchy, archbishops, clergy alone, but everyone. "In Him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit," (Eph.2:22) "speaking the truth in love," (Eph.4:15) living in and being the sacramental Body of Christ. We all receive Christ. We all can find a way to share him with others. We are all charged with being stewards of this world in the totality of the life of each of us, whether our "bully pulpit" is big or small. And everyone means everyone.

Standing Committee

As mentioned previously, the Diocesan Standing Committee will be meeting Sept. 25-27 at Holy Cross Retreat Center in Mesilla, NM, to chart our way through the murky waters of ACNA's institutional structure, keeping in mind our mandate from Christ to be His body. Your prayers and viewpoints are welcome in preparation for that discussion.

Parish Estimates

In order to plan for next year, including our options for our future structure, the Standing Committee needs some idea of what the financial contributions will be, as the options available will be impacted by the funds available. It is always, of course, an estimate and I realize that solid information may not be available until annual meetings later this year or early next year. Nevertheless, as close an estimate as possible is important. It needs to be received no later than Sept. 24, and can be sent to my email.

Your bishop,
+Win

Parish News

The End of Hatred

Submitted by Father Michael Penfield

Lately, I have seen written and heard spoken some pretty hateful things. And surprisingly, some of these comments have come from fellow Christians. Clearly, some have come from frustrated Christians who sense that our society is changing, moving away from its Judeo-Christian roots. Some lash out because of frustration, fearing that no one either will hear them, or will understand what they are saying. And in the passion of the moment, these people will say something that, I hope in retrospect, they regret.

But unfortunately others have lashed out because, quite honestly, they are used to bullying their way through to their goals. That is how they handle their spouses; that is how they handle their business dealings; and that is even how

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they handle their churches. In other words, that is how they have always gotten their way. Through intimidation they have always ended up the “winner.”

Then, this summer, I was reading a book recommended to me that contained comments that troubled me greatly. These comments seem to be feeding off the same theological beliefs that fed the vitriolic speeches I have heard lately. The author of this book was writing about Revelation generally, and about imprecatory prayers specifically. For those who do not know, imprecatory prayers are prayers to curse your enemies. He wrote, “Jesus was instructing His disciples to pray imprecatory prayers, beseeching God to destroy Israel, to wither the fig tree, to cast the apostate mountain into the sea.” (*Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, by David Chilton, Dominion Press, Fort Worth, Texas (1987), page 238.)

It is clear this author is diametrically opposed to the theological beliefs incorporated in Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and the Rapture. And this peaked my interest. I wanted to know the bases for his beliefs. However, I found it quite troubling when he wrote, “But we have fallen under a pagan delusion that it is somehow ‘unchristian’ to pray for God’s wrath to be poured out upon the enemies and persecutors of the Church. Yet that is what we see God’s people doing, with God’s approval, in both Testaments of the Holy Scriptures.” (Ibid. at page 195.) He then sites passages to support his contention that imprecatory prayers are a “necessary aspect of the Christian attitude,” and

that without it, we are in danger of becoming impotent – unable to confront evil and even in danger of being “captured and dominated” by our “enemies.” (See *ibid.*)

My problem with this analysis is namely Jesus Christ. After the Jewish people who happened to be at Pilate’s palace on that fateful Good Friday said, “His blood be on us, and on our children.” (Matthew 27: 25) Jesus, while dying on the Cross, prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34) This does not sound like the same God who asks us to pray for the destruction of Judea for crucifying His Messiah.

Christianity is not a religion of revenge. It is a faith based on Christ, who did not ask us to pray for vengeance, especially when persecuted. In His Sermon on the Mount, Christ tells us, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.’ But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48) This does not sound like God is calling us to pray that fire and brimstone be heaped on our enemies or on the enemies of the Church.

Parish News (continued)

Remember, in the Lord's Prayer we pray, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (emphasis added). In other words, forgive us to the extent we forgive others the wrongs they have done to us. If we pray for others to be judged and cursed, how can we then ask for or expect mercy?

There is an Antiochian Church near my former parish that is predominantly made up of Palestinian Christians. Several months after 9/11, an arsonist burned the church to the ground. No one knows who did it, but one of the few things to survive the fire was the Gospel used during the Divine Liturgy. All the pages were burned, and the only thing that was legible was this passage:

"But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." (Matthew 5:39-40)

The priest and rector of this Palestinian Christian church quoted this section and asked all his parishioners to forgive this arsonist. The question I must ask you is this: who is being more Christ-like, this priest calling for forgiveness for a terrible wrong, or the author telling us to pray imprecatory prayers to curse our enemies?

The problem with imprecatory prayers is that they end up cursing those who pray them. We become intolerant, thinking our sins are somehow less sinful than others, or that our sins are forgiven but others are not, or even that somehow, because we have reached a point in

our personal learning curve, others who have not reached the same point at the same time are inferior and unworthy of understanding. In other words, these prayers curse us by turning us into Pharisees who think they are better than everyone else.

If we ever feel the need to pray an imprecatory prayer, I have a suggestion. Instead of praying for our enemies' destruction, how about praying for their conversion? Instead of praying for the destruction of the Muslims, or the Palestinians, or the Jews, or the Republicans, or the Democrats, how about praying for their souls? How about praying for everyone's enlightenment, understanding, and peace instead of fire, brimstone, and obliteration? We may find that through prayer we gain insight, not only into the souls of those whom we thought were our enemies, but also into our own souls.

It is time to end the hate. It is time to stop our need to judge others. A church without sinners is an empty church. We are not living an adaptation of Animal Farm where all the animals are sinners, but some sins are "less sinful" than others. The next time we want to judge someone for a sexual sin, think about how many times we have lost our tempers – something Christ said God judges to be as bad as murder. Or how many times we told a rumor or gossiped to someone else. And instead of praying for something evil, let's pray for something good. Who knows; prayers are powerful. They may just change the world.

Amen



Parish News (continued)

As most of you know, Monique Williams has been making prayer ropes (Komboskini). She puts her heart into every rope she makes. She has shared with us a brief description and history of the prayer ropes.

Prayer Rope - Komboskini (Greek) / Chotki (Russian)

Orthodox tradition- a loop of knots used to keep track of the number of prayers which have been said. There is typically a knotted cross where the prayer rope is joined together, and a few spacer beads at certain intervals for ease in counting.

The rope is traditionally used with the prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.", but any prayer or combination of prayers can be said.

For more information about the modern day usage of prayer ropes, and the Jesus prayer, I recommend listening to or reading this talk given by Bishop Kalistos Ware:

http://www.ancientfaith.com/specials/kallistos_lectures/word_and_silence_in_the_philokalia

Styles:

The traditional color of the rope is black (symbolizing mourning for one's sins) and were tied with pure wool cord (symbolizing the flock of Christ). Sometimes polished Jerusalem Olive wood beads are strung together in place of cord.

The ends of an Orthodox prayer rope can differ. The Greek style (Komboskini) ends with a knotted cross. The Russian style (Chotki) ends with a cross and tassel, often made in red to remind of the blood of Christ.

The most common lengths are 100-knot ropes, or 33 knot bracelets (the age at which Jesus was crucified). A monk might be given a black 300 or 500 knot rope from his Bishop upon tonsure.

Though prayer ropes are often tied by monastics, lay persons are permitted to make them also.

History:

It's invention is attributed to St Anthony of the Desert in the fourth century as an aid for illiterate Monks to accomplish a consistent number of prayers. "The purpose is to help us concentrate, not necessarily to count."

The weight of the rope either in the pocket, or wrapped around the left wrist when not in use, would remind the monks to pray constantly in accordance with St. Paul's injunction in 1st Thessalonians.

Previously, monks would count their prayers by casting pebbles or seeds into a bowl, but this was cumbersome, and could not be easily accomplished when outside the cell.

Finally, the knots of an Orthodox prayer rope are complicated, with many crossings and very symbolic.

The story of the "angelic knot" :

There was a monk who wanted to make a prayer rope in order to count his prayers. However, each time that the monk completed a few knots, a demon would come by and untie them all. The demon knew for what purpose the monk was

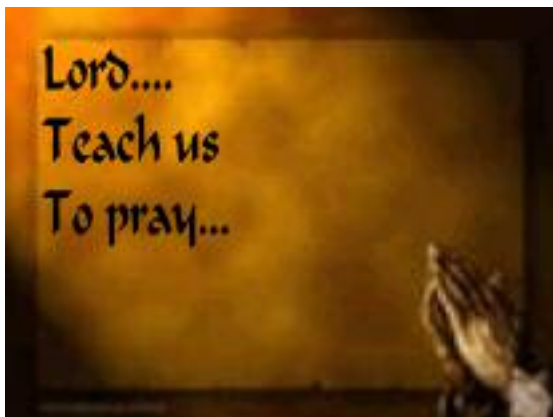
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tying his rope and out of fear and spite wanted to keep him from being able to complete it. One day an angel of God appeared to the monk and, answering his prayers for help, taught him how to make a special kind of knot composed of seven interconnected crosses. This knot was so complicated and, having on it so many crosses, the demon was unable to untie it and the monk was finally able to finish his rope!

If you would like information about obtaining a prayer rope please visit Monique's website at: <http://jesusprayer.jottit.com>

Prayer Requests

Please pray for the many Christians being persecuted all over the world.
Pray for wisdom for the Standing Committee as they meet this month, that God's will be done.
Pray for Robert Herrell and others in the diocese who are ill and need God's healing and comfort.



Hint of Humor

