

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

3 Easter
April 22, 2007
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Ordinary People, Extraordinary Church”

Today is the third Sunday of Easter and the readings that the church puts before us today, are about conversion and having the faith to know who Jesus is in your life.

The readings also focus on the two men who Jesus chooses to bring his teaching to the world. As men and leaders Peter and Paul are vastly different. One is born into wealth and the other into poverty; one is a lawyer and scholar; the other a simple fisherman one is a Roman Citizen; the other a peasant belonging to a fishing village. One is married and one is single.

For over thirty years their lives and ministries will interface. Yet, they never appear to have anything in common, except that they both proclaim the Gospel and each has Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Paul is saved from himself and his murderous ways towards the Christians; Peter is redeemed from betrayal and having fled rather than stand by his master at the cross.

There is a sense in which they represent the whole church of Christ. Each in the end acknowledges that they are so flawed, as men and people, that it is only the tender mercy of Christ as their God that makes any sense of their lives. It is only the hand of Jesus filling them with God's spirit that gives them the courage and ability to go on, when things seem lost, to preserve against overwhelming odds. It is only the spirit that allows them to succeed in any way, with ministry, converting people to Christ, and growing Christ's church.

What I place before you this morning is the proposition that left to ourselves, you and I are exactly like Peter and Paul. Without God's grace and the salvation of Christ, we are just as flawed and capable of greed, selfishness and betrayal. The transformation that takes place in Peter and Paul also takes place in us, and for the same reason that we too have been touched by the hand of God. It is not just that at Baptism the Holy Spirit entered our lives and has been a force in that life. It is that we are constantly being touched by the 'living word' of the Gospel and in the most unusual of ways.

Two of those ways, were through the lives of Mary Anderson and Paul Adams who we commemorate at the 8:00 and the 10:00 services; two people from different backgrounds; one a homemaker, wife and mother and the other a university professor. Yet, their faith and spirituality touched so many people's lives. Mary the life-long Episcopalian, passing on a deep faith through love, family and understanding. Paul the searcher, always asking

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

Church of the Good Shepherd

and

St. John the Evangelist

questions and challenging us to seek for answers and go deeper into the mystery of our God.

Their lives we celebrate in Eucharist today, and in doing so we ask of ourselves, “whose life are we touching with precious gift we have been given of faith, the spirit and the ‘living word’ of Christ.” For we all know that is the way that our God works. We do not receive his grace for no reason, but in all things we know that we are a part of an eternal plan.

At one stage of his life St Paul languishes in prison in chains. He refuses to despair or be down hearted and tells even his captors that; “These are chains for Christ.” The longer he is imprisoned the more he hears that others have taken up his mission and continue his work. Without him lying in prison, he knows that they would never have had the courage to speak the Gospel out loud.

He prays that in this way Christ will be preached and it gives him joy. He tells his fellow Christian: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, but I know he still has work for me to do in the body.”

Love or hate Paul and his writings, we all have to acknowledge that once he committed himself to Christ, he did so 100%. He held nothing back. His life was no longer his own and shipwreck, storm or prison could not stop him proclaiming Christ in every city, village and street.

Peter too, is aware that of himself he is unworthy to proclaim the Gospel, but just the knowledge that Christ chose him is enough to allow him to preach in his name. He writes: “As you come to him, the living stone rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Peter becomes wiser as he ages and he begins to see the links between God’s promises of old, and what he is asking of each of us to bring his plan of salvation about. In 2:9 he writes: “For you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, for you have received his mercer and are commissioned to proclaim his word.”

Peter and Paul are ordinary people transformed into extraordinary people because they have allowed God’s spirit to be a force in their lives.

The last week in our country, town and in our church has been one of so many mixed emotions. We gathered here, 4:00pm on Monday the 16th to welcome Schantz and sadly learned the news from each other of Virginia Tech and the loss of so many vibrant young lives. In all that has been said and reported in the days since then, an overwhelming atmosphere and consensus seems to be that we no longer want our children to live lives of fear that such violence will reoccur. More, we know we need to control their exposure to

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

graphic violence whether it is movies or computer generated. Are Americans now longing for a better quality of life devoid of what the media have served up to us for so long? I think so.

Violence, rudeness, language have all been singled out for attention in recent weeks. As Christians, it reminds us, that the central message of Jesus relates to how we treat each other and the love that guides our life.

The week was also bitter sweet, because even as we watched the Schantz crew hard at work and the space fill with pipe organ, our thoughts were of Richard. Richard's discerning gaze and nods of agreement and appreciation were so sorely missed as we lived through this week.

Oh we imaged what the big guy would say and we could imagine his great smile of satisfaction, but we missed our friend and the inspiration that he gave us. It was a happy/sad week. I for one was glad when it was over and now I look forward to all the other things we need to do to bring God's word and make it an effective force in our town.

There is something that constantly irks me about Milford and it should bug you also. Anytime I read a book, magazine, map or description of our town every thing religious has been written out of it. Whether it is the tour guide, Grey Towers or the Historic map and plaque outside the library, there is no mention or place for religion, churches or the spiritual life of this place. It is almost as if, those atheistic liberals of the sixties and early seventies have re-written history and told us, "that this town was founded and developed by people totally devoid of God."

It bugs me, because we know that the opposite was true. It was Christian families, Brodhead, Findley, Mott, Elrede, Van Auken, Dimmick, Pinchot and many others who brought the town into being and used their churches as a base for all their activities.

Perhaps it is time that like Peter and Paul we too shout that we will not be shut-up, or shut-out and that we our families and values are as important and as needed as ever before. We are going no where. We will worship, speak out and play our music and take an active role in this community. It is our way of proclaiming the Gospel; it is our way of demonstrating that our God lives; it is our way of telling our children that goodness will prevail over evil in the end.

As one community we pray for the victims of violence. As one church we thank God for his blessings. As brothers and sisters we unite with Mary and Paul in glorifying our God.

Amen+

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383