

# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

2<sup>nd</sup> Easter  
April 23, 2006  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## **“The Never Ending Story”**

In the center of the Mediterranean Sea is an island called Malta. It is 12 miles long by some 7 miles wide. It is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostle as the place where St Paul came ashore after his shipwrecked. Maltese people are not like any other people, they have a population of only 400,000. They have their own language which is more like Arabic than Italian. They are known for their hospitality and friendliness, but some 75% of their young people leave the Island for Australia, South Africa, the UK or the USA. There, they run tailoring and clothing businesses, making jewelry and many other luxury goods.

Malta is one of the most beautiful and historic places in the Mediterranean. It was in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century that it held out for 565 days in a siege by the Ottoman Turks.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War it was attacked for two years by German and Italian planes. It was the most important allied base in the Mediterranean, supplying everything from gas to ammunition to British and American forces in North Africa and Egypt. It was the only friendly port between Gibraltar and Alexandria. In 1945 the whole island and her people were awarded the George Cross, the highest decoration awarded to non-military personnel in the face of the enemy.

In 1976 I was stationed in Malta and experienced some of that great Maltese hospitality. The whole island is Christian. Each town and village has its own saint, church and fiesta. Even buses and taxi cabs have a shrine to a favorite saint behind the driver's seat..

Out in St Paul's Bay stands the great statue of St Paul rising out of the water. He does not face Malta, but faces out to sea towards the coast of Europe. It has become a symbol of the way the Maltese too have left the Island bringing the Gospel of Christ, and their deep faith with them.

In late August a wind from the south blows across the island. It is a hot wind that has crossed the Sahara Desert. The natives called it “Scirroco.” For them it is the wind of the Spirit that carried Paul to their island bringing the faith, and carried him away again to bring the Gospel to the very heart of the Roman Empire.

Wherever Maltese people go they bring Paul and the Gospel with them. Irish people talk about their emigrants as the “World Geese,” but Maltese simply refer to theirs as “Scirroco.”

Wind and breath play a big part in the Old Testament to describe the coming or the presence of God. Scripture speaks of the “Ra'ah of God.” The breath of God, that brings life to all things and grows Creation.

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Today's Gospel describes how Jesus comes into the presence of the Apostles and says to them: "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit." The Bible uses the same word "Ra'ah" the breath of God. The Spirit is the breath of life that transforms us.

This sending out, is enormously important to Christians. It is a part of the Great Commission, which is Jesus' command to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. It is the Spirit who is seen as empowering us to perform that task. In scripture it is called "Evangelism", meaning to proclaim or call forth. Each of us by virtue of our Baptism is called to be Evangelists. How we accomplish that is often radically different. C.S. Lewis the writer accomplished it through his books, stories and novels. He was an Agnostic till 1930, when he underwent a conversion experience while riding on top of a bus in Oxford. He claimed that he came to the realization that Christianity was right for him after the greatest intellectual, struggle, debate, and much reading. But he found God in none of these. He found God when one day sitting on the top deck of a bus. He realized that somehow all his life God had been calling to him and he had just been too busy to answer.

As a Christian, Lewis was very Orthodox. He went to an Anglican church outside Oxford much like this one. He was a jovial and saintly man who never became rich because he regularly gave two thirds of his salary away to worthy causes. But it was when Lewis picked up his pen that he became at once, an Apostle, Evangelist and a defender of the Gospel.

From the Screwtape letters, to the Chronicles of Narnia he wrote in a style that captured people's hearts with the simple truth of the Gospel and he did it through story.

They say that we lost the art of story telling and with it the ability to pass what is important and of value on to our children.

If we too are to take up the Great Commission and become Evangelists, then we have to rediscover the Art of Story. Stories are what children remember long after the teller is dead and gone. Several years ago a book came out written by an Episcopalian called: "Will our children have faith?" So often it is our faith stories that speak to them more than any other one thing.

Paul Adams was a story teller. Like C.S. Lewis he had a hunger for knowledge. He read a great deal. Most of all he liked to share what he had learnt. He shared it with his children and with his grandchildren. He had an abiding belief that somehow his story and his struggles could help them and point them in the right direction. That is a kind of Evangelism. He was very good at it.

Today we also remember Mary Anderson, who passed 12 months ago tomorrow. When she died her family shared with us many of the stories that made up her life. We all came away from that experience convinced that it was the "sharing of story" that banded that family together. That too is Evangelism.

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Today's Gospel story of Thomas' doubt is so well known. How this story must have been used to encourage faith and cast out doubt. Stories can do that. They inspire us and give us courage. In 1976 I visited the home of an elderly Maltese gentleman in Sliema Malta. He told me the story of the attack on the Island in 1941. The Maltese only had three planes to face the enemy air force. They were old fashioned swordfish by-planes. Day after day they went up to war off the Italian bombers. The Maltese named them Faith, Hope and Charity. Eventually they were all shot down. But their courage and their story became a source of inspiration to the people in their quest to survive. 60 years later it is the story that is remembered.

We too have a story to tell in this parish. It is an ongoing story that has been growing in recent years. Mary, Paul and Lillian and Franklyn helped and inspired us to live out that story.

Let us not forget them today in this Eucharist nor shall we forget to write them into the annals of our history when that book is at last written; that they may continue to inspire others, and remain in our hearts. "And Jesus said to them: Peace be with you! As the Father sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit"

Amen+

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