

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

6 Easter
April 27, 2008
Fr Bill McGinty

“We Do Not Worship a Stupid God; We Worship the God of Truth”

Have you ever found yourself praying at an unexpected time, in an unexpected place? Quite out of the blue you find a prayer on your lips or processing in your mind.

It is an experience that we all have from time to time. We are alone and we just feel the need to speak to God. Formal prayer will not do it. We feel stripped of our pretensions; it is as if, we have a premonition of that judgment moment, when it is just God and us.

The readings for today’s services from Acts, 1 Peter, and John’s Gospel are all about this encounter with God. Paul attempts to introduce the God of creation and salvation to the Greeks of Athens. Peter tells the Christians that Christ has given us access through his suffering to God our Father. Lastly, in the Gospel Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples that the love of God might abide in them.

At times too, we can be like the Athenians worshipping a God that we do not know. There really is no excuse for it, because God has revealed himself in page after page of Holy Scripture, if we cared to take up his word and read it. God has revealed himself in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, if we would only practice what he taught. God has revealed himself in millions of moments of inspiration in our lives, from the birth of a child to a daily sunset. So why do we want to turn God into the unknown God of the Greeks? Why do we choose to forget he is the God of love, the forgiving God, the God of awesome wonder, the Father God?

We turn God into the “unknown stone God” every time we answer an e-mail that says prove that you truly believe in the salvation of Jesus Christ by sending this story to twelve of your friends.

Salvation cannot depend on sending useless e-mails. God does not keep count. God is not waiting for us to step on a crack on the sidewalk. God is not an obsessive compulsive. God does not go back to check he locked the door. We do not worship a stupid God. God can live with imperfection. He created us, didn’t he? Salvation, our salvation is not a game of Shoots and Ladders. We do not roll the dice and hope against hope that we land on the right number to merit heaven.

Every week my two sisters in Canada send me inspirational stories, that if I download and send to 20 friends, grace, forgiveness, money and opportunity will flood into my life.

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Recently, it has been getting so bad that I hit delete as soon as I see their name. Their hubby could have died or they could have hit the lottery, it does not matter. I see the word, Felski or Watts-delete!

Expecting God to respond to our stupidly is much like the Maya civilization of Central America sacrificing their children for success in battle or a fertile harvest. From time to time, in some way or other, we are tempted to turn our religious thought into superstition.

In the Gospel today Jesus tells us not to do it. He tells his disciples don't do what is right because of fear of what will happen to you; rather do not do wrong because you love me. Do you not know that we are a family? I have told you over and over that my father is your father. I will send someone to you. He will be your counselor and your guide."

There is nothing more that God could have done for us to make sure that he was not for us, "The unknown God!" For Christ did not send us a stranger. He sent us his Spirit to be with us. That Spirit does not dwell in the Vatican nor Canterbury Cathedral; the Spirit of God dwells in our hearts. That is why Jesus exclaims: "I will not leave you orphaned, I live in you."

It is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that makes each one of us Christian. It is the Spirit that gives us access to God's grace. In the Spirit we receive wisdom, understanding counsel, fortitude knowledge and piety and the love of God. So why would we look outside ourselves and seek God in superstition when Christ has told us he dwells within each one of us.

In that sense we are temples. We are a sacred space. We are a Body for Christ. Is it any wonder that Paul tells us: "make sure you are worthy, make sure you are righteous, that Christ, our Christ may find a home within."

Today we Baptize Taylor Joann. In doing so, we perform an ancient ritual in washing her in the waters of Baptism.

We mark her with the sacred oil of Chrism and we invite the God of love into her life. With her family, we welcome her and let her know she belongs and is cherished. In the ritual her Godparent will hold her Baptismal candle as a symbol of her faith, with the instruction to keep that flame alive in her life till she can carry it for herself. We wish Taylor and her family happiness as they celebrate this sacred day in her life.

Two hundred and thirty two years ago this July, our founding fathers put their names to the Declaration of Independence. 62 years later John Adams in his final year despaired that the Spirit and truth of what he called "Our Revolution" had been lost. "Now" he said "they paint pictures of a scene that never took place. They paint in faces of people who

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were never there. Today, newspapers get it all wrong and the truth of that great and historic event is lost.”

The letters between Adams and Jefferson in their final years reflect the sadness they both felt that the purity of purpose of those founding fathers had been hijacked by a sea of greed and foolish men.

St Paul, in his writings is at pains to point out to us that the truth of Jesus Christ, his agenda and mission cannot be hijacked or distorted. For in sending the Holy Spirit God has insured that truth will be protected.

“Men will come” says Jesus and claim: “I have the truth.” Only by their fruits will you know that they speak in my name.

Let us all pray that the Spirit of Truth will dwell within us. That his mission be our mission, his agenda be our agenda and that his spirit dwells within each one of us.

Amen+

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