

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

13 Pentecost
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Fr. Bill McGinty

“Visions and Dreams”

The Bible is full of stories of dreams and dreamers. It is a common denominator that extends from the Patriarchs, such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all the way to the New Testament and Joseph, the husband of Mary.

Stories of dreams are a way scripture uses to communicate God’s revelation to his people. So we find Joseph the son of Jacob relating his boyhood dreams to his brothers. His brothers react with jealous rage as Joseph tells them how in the wheat fields their sheaves bow in homage to his. Then of course, Joseph’s translation of Pharaoh’s dream allows him to escape prison and a death sentence to become the 2nd most powerful man in all Egypt.

King David is condemned by the dream of the Prophet Nathan after he sends poor Uriah the husband of Bathsheba to his death.

But it is the New Testament where Joseph twice has dreams that affect the birth of the Messiah. The first to marry Mary, and the second to ‘take the child and his mother and flee into Egypt.’

One of the things to happen to you as a priest and a pastor is that people insist on telling you their dreams. I never take this lightly as I know from studying Psychology that psychologists take dreams very seriously and insist on their patients writing them down.

Dreams tell us so much about our mental state. They reveal our fears and deepest concerns. They well up from our subconscious mind, replaying memories and events. These dreams are often so vivid that we have difficulty distinguishing them from reality.

Many saints throughout history had dreams that were so vivid that they dictated their mission for the rest of their lives. The Italian priest, John Bosco, as a young man had a dream that he was walking over a grassy hillside towards a group of schoolboys. Suddenly, from behind a rock came ten larger boys who attacked the younger boys in a bullying fashion. John was so incensed that he threw himself into the fight punching, kicking and biting. He was so intent on the fight that he did not see a stranger approach. But when he looked up Jesus the Good Shepherd was standing by his side. He looked at John and said: “John this is not the way.” He pointed to all the boys. Before John’s eyes all the boys turned into sheep. Jesus handed John his staff and said to him: “You must become a gentle shepherd.”

John had the dream several times in his life. He recounted it many times over the years. John Bosco’s story became famous because he dedicated his life to teaching, educating and

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training the lost children of the Industrial Revolution. Today his schools and colleges are on every continent and most countries in the world. You need only travel as far as Bergen County to find Don Bosco Prep in New Jersey. In 1934 they decided to make John Bosco the Patron Saint of Youth. It was a decision that they made deliberately because of what was happening throughout Europe. In Germany Hitler took over the popular Boy Scout movement and turned it into the Hitler Youth to turn Germany's young people into Nazis. The same was happening in Italy under Mussolini and in Spain under Franco. Things became so bad in Germany that free thinking parents who opposed Hitler were betrayed by their own children.

Don Bosco taught his boys that their spirituality could be found in doing every day common things well and offering it to God as prayer. Finding one of his students in the church praying on a Sunday afternoon he said to him: "Dominic your place is on the soccer field helping your team to win the game. God is found in the joy you bring to the ordinary things in your life. You do not need to be kneeling in church to be praying."

Don Bosco's schools teach the same lessons today that God wants joy, play and hard work from young people in their journey towards adulthood.

You may wonder why I decided to preach today about dreams and even John Bosco, other than the fact that I was educated in a Salesian school. It is because last week I had a dream that was so vivid that I was able to recall it the next day or at least some of it.

I had been, in the dream, coming home heading West on I-84 I came through Port Jervis and wanted to cross the bridge at the Delaware, but when I got to the Flo Jean I found that I couldn't because the bridge was gone. So I turned back to the Tri-state and went up on 84 again, this time coming off at Matamoras. I turned right at the bottom of the ramp only to find water everywhere and no way to get to Ave M. I turned back and headed up 209 only to be stopped by flooding at Perkins and the Sunoco garage. Frustrated I went on 84 thinking that everyone would have found refuge in the church. Coming down the hill passing the Apple Valley, I saw that most houses and buildings had been washed away. Turning into Fifth Street I was met with scenes of devastation. The old rectory was gone and cars were piled up against the walls of the church. The windows and roof were gone as were the doors. Walking inside, I found the old pews piled high but parts of the floor collapsing. The pipe organ was gone and only the walls remained.

As sad as all this seemed to be, what concerned me most was that the place was deserted and there were no signs of people. I suddenly realized that driving through Milford I hadn't seen a solitary person. Fearing that it was going to get dark, I decided to get out of the church. I was just getting into my car when I saw Eileen Galka standing on one side of Catharine St. She said: "I think they're all on top of Cummins Hill Rd."

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I still don't know why I didn't give Eileen a ride; I just said thanks and drove off. The bottom of Cummins Hill was flooded so I had to wade through the water and then walk. It seemed that I walked for hours uphill and around every bend. Still I didn't meet anyone. At last, I got to Rod and Gun Rd and turned right down to Al and Bonnie's house. Everyone was in their yard and on their deck having a bard-b-que. "Well, where have you been" said Lucie Brooks. "We thought we had lost you in the flood. We saved the cross and the candlesticks, so we can probably start all over again."

But as for that, no one else seemed overly concerned. People were eating food, chatting and the kids were playing in the yard.

After a dream like this you begin to really wonder the next day what did I eat? What did I drink? Where was Maryann?

Analyzing it throughout the week I began to realize that the dream contains all the things I have been working on and worrying about over the last few weeks. Most of that is concerned with the Parish Project which takes place here at church and in individual homes.

The conclusion of the parish project is where we look to share our dreams and visions for the future. It will be the result of six weeks of discussion where we attempt to rediscover "Our True Story" and where we go from here.

What do we mean by that? Simply, that we look at our origins and the scripture that calls us to be an Episcopal presence in this place. What is our mission, how are we carrying it out and how could we carry it out in the future?

The Parish Project is important because it examines our spiritual journey and asks us to deepen our commitment to the Gospel and to our Lord Jesus Christ.

The more that I thought about the dream the more I realized that it contains all my worst fears. Yet, in hindsight it also contains a very real truth. That is that the church is not the pews or the windows, the Pipe Organ or the stones. The church is where ever God's people gather. For Jesus said: "Where two or three of you are gathered in my name there I will be in your midst."

As we come closer to the beginning of the Parish Project on September 14th, I would ask you to sign up for one of the 6 venues. You can also fill out the questionnaire survey that asks you to contribute your views on the parish over the last 25 years.

We live in a changing world and a changing Pike County. To be affective witnesses and presence here we need to know, what we are about and where we are going. To do nothing is to allow for the probable. To sit down together and dream dreams and to come up with a

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vision is to invite the possible. In this Eucharist, let us begin the next stage of “Out Story” by inviting the Holy Spirit to lead us along the right path, the path of Christ’s mission and salvation. This we ask in Jesus’ name.

Amen+

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