

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

8 Pentecost
July 10, 2005
Fr Bill McGinty

“The Africa Sermon”

My wife Maryann has a friend called Jean. She is a nice person. She is a nurse and her husband's name is John. We all went out to dinner one night and I discovered that the only thing John and I had in common was Rock Music from the fifties, sixties and seventies. Name any year, any group or singer or even any song in those thirty years and John will give you an answer, with the exception of August '69 to August '70, when he was recovering from Woodstock and really can't remember anything.

“Who sang: ‘Juliette,’ in the summer of ‘63?” Back comes the answer. “The Four Pennies”
“On which album will you find the Beatle song, ‘Michelle?’” Answer: “Rubber Soul”
“What group sang ‘Black is Black’ in 1966?” Answer: “Los Bravos”
“Who left the Commodores to sing, ‘Can't slow down’ as a solo artist?” Answer: “Lionel Richie” John knew all the answers.

The golden age of Rock music has now some bands still touring that are so old they could, if they needed apply for Medicare. While they have aged, the Rolling Stones, the Everly Brothers, Status Quo and many others, their songs live on. All this came to mind this week because of Live 8.

Live 8, as you know are the eight live concerts around the world dedicated to persuading the Big Eight leaders of World Trade to do something about poverty in Africa.

Artists such as Paul McCartney, U2 and Elton John offered to give their services free of charge to make a statement to the world.

1. Treat African countries fairly in terms of trade.
2. Forgive them their economic debts.
3. Give 25 billion to Africa's poorest nations to help them catch up.

The demands seem tough, but in terms of the global economy they are a drop in the ocean. For decades Africa has been falling behind the rest of the world in terms of development. There are many reasons for this including European countries propensity for trading arms and weapons for African raw materials. Instead of investing in Infra-structure and agriculture, successive Africa Juntas and Military Heads of State have squandered their countries resources on war, Civil wars and bloody revolutions. This has led to a cycle of violence, famine and slaughter that has gone unabated for thirty to forty years.

Live 8 is an attempt to call a halt and to make Western leaders face up to their responsibilities within the Global economy. Meeting in Scotland this week the Big 8 cannot say they have not been told. The world watches and waits their response.

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There is something about the Gospel of Jesus that is discovered differently by each succeeding generation. The generation who lived through the Great Depression saw in Jesus' words compassion and love for the poor and those who suffer hardships. The great generation who fought the Second World War took from the Gospel a cry for justice and a peace that resides on the other side of war.

Today's generation of young people can awaken us all to the economic racism and prejudice that goes on in the world. Today's Gospel is the Gospel of Africa, black poor, diseased and broken by the years of war and famine.

Africa's problems are our problems. Africa's pain has to become our pain. Life on this planet began on the African continent and in a real sense as well as a "Gospel Christian Sense," these are our brothers and sisters.

James Maguire was an English priest I knew who went to Uganda in the early 1950's. He wasn't a missionary in the classical sense of that word. He didn't paddle canoes up rivers or work in jungle villages. James taught in the University of Uganda in the capital, Kampala. He was also the University Chaplain. He was very fond of photography and brought many slides home for us to view. The campus of the University was very modern, with lawns, walkways, modern labs and buildings and great sports facilities. Fr. James would point to individuals and couples and tell you precisely where they worked and lived now around the world. His scrapbooks were a record of success and he was as proud of that college as he would have been of Yale or Princeton.

His students were smart, accomplished and talented and before them stretched golden futures. But all that changed with military coupe of 1971 and the takeover of Idi Amin. In ten short years Uganda plunged into a deep dark hell of killings, war, violence and corruption. Education, schools, churches and even the University vanished, despised by a military that hated books and learning.

Jesus makes this point in the Gospel of Matthew "that the truth, the Gospel, will enlighten all men. But those who are evil will seek to do their work in the dark."

Never has the Gospel been so needed, as it is needed in many African countries. Yet, if we are to say that, if we are to preach the Gospel to Africa, we need to be darn sure that we know the Gospel ourselves and that we live by it. For the Gospel is a two edged sword that will defend you and seek for you Justice. Yet, it will also cut you down and judge you if you do not live by its mandates and its moral principles.

When the Gospel says, "Give!" it means "Give until it hurts." When the Gospel says "forgive", it means forgive totally, father, brother, sister, mother, son or daughter. We are comfortable with that. But what about Mother- in- law, ex-wife, ex-boss or the kid that injured you kid or the hit and run driver who ran you over. We all like to tailor the Gospel to suit ourselves. We would all like a comfortable Gospel with Mary and Joseph in a nice

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cozy stable with baby Jesus smiling up at us and the shepherds bowing and the stars twinkling.

But what if right before our eyes the scene changed and the stable turned dirty and diseased, and Mary and Joseph were Sudanese in rags, with bones protruding and the baby crying with a pot belly and giant head, Bethlehem in Dafur, Southern Sudan where thousands die each month. This is not the Holy Bible, this is the screaming Gospel. This is not Jesus in a long white robe preaching the Sermon on the Mount. This is Jesus the Christ naked hanging nailed to a cross crying, “Father forgive them. Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.”

Sometimes we need a wake up call. The young of the world gave us such a call with their wild music in 1985 at the Live Aid Concerts. They gave us another one 20 years later with Live 8 Concerts last week.

Their call should have been as clear as the first line of John’s Gospel: “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning and without him was nothing that was made. In him was light and the light was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness grasps it not.”

To every one of us who have heard the call of the Gospel in our lives, we have an obligation. On that obligation and duty rests our eternal salvation. We are obligated to make the light of the Gospel shine into the lives of others.

If you think church and coming to church is a social event you are wrong. If you think the service is over at the final hymn when you walk through the door, you are equally wrong. This is not a social function, this is a revolution. Jesus did not come for chit-chat, Jesus came to bring change. Jesus did not seek fellowship; he came to turn the world upside down, back to front and inside out. Christians are not supposed to be nice guys. Christians are supposed to annoy the hell out of governments, politicians, judges and just about everyone else and effect change. Change men’s hearts, fight ignorance, famine, racism and every other evil till we live in a world fit for heroes or at least fit to live in.

I’m sick of hearing Christians apologizing for their every existence. The Gospel makes you uncomfortable, tough. You don’t want guilt about your abortion, don’t have one. You want our ten commandments off your Federal Building, hard lines, we were here first and we built it. You don’t like looking at TV pictures of starving kids in Africa, we don’t care. Give up a meal. You don’t like the Gospel you are in the wrong place. The Gospel as the kids say is hot, grasp it, live it, teach it, embrace it, but for God’s sake don’t ignore it.

Last week a lot of our young people lived it, embraced it and hailed it out of love for those tiny faces of Africa and their brothers and sisters in that place. Where the young lead let us follow. When the Gospel calls let us answer.

Amen+

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