

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

9 Pentecost  
July 28, 2007  
Fr. Bill McGinty

**“Knocking on Heaven’s Door”**

Jesus said: “Peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you, let your hearts be troubled.”

When we look back at our lives we realize more and more that, all our lives we have sought peace. Peace of mind, free from worry, peace of heart, knowing we are loved, peace in our home knowing that we need not be afraid.

When Jesus re-appears to the Apostles he greets them with the words: “Peace be with you, as the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Christians by their very calling are arbiters of peace. It numbers among the fruits of the Holy Spirit. “Charity, joy, peace...”

Jesus in his three years of ministry constantly seeks out a quiet place to go and to pray. It is for him a place of peace, where his soul might find rest and he can pray to his father in heaven. Sometimes it is in the desert or into the hills; sometimes it is walking by the Sea of Galilee or taking a boat out across the lake. Alone he seeks to pray and dialogue with his father. We are told that Angels visit him and bring him comfort.

In today’s Gospel Jesus’ disciples come to him, asking him to teach them to pray. The prayer that Jesus teaches them begins with the word Father. It denotes a relationship. In the Old Testament God was always referred to as Lord or Yahweh, the one who is. But when you speak of God as Father, you immediately acknowledge yourself as a Child of God. Many Jews already saw this in the person of Jesus, when they called him Son of God.

In saying “Hallowed be your name,” Jesus was teaching his disciples the first obligation of mankind: to acknowledge and worship its God. For Jews it was fundamental. That was why the Sabbath was so important to them. All worship begins with thanksgiving, worshiping God shows our appreciation.

Someone told me recently, “Church doesn’t do it for me. I don’t feel fulfilled. I’m not getting anything out of it for me.”

We don’t come to church to be fulfilled. We come to church to worship our God. We come to church to stand by the cross as Jesus dies for the whole human race; we come to church to say: “Father Hallowed be your name.”

When we utter the word: “Father,” we are already knocking on heaven’s door. We are already begging for God’s help in our life. “Give us this day our daily bread,” is not just about bread. It is about the power of God to infiltrate our lives and fill it with the things we need to nurture and sustain us, whether that be employment or paying the bills.

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Miracles are only miracles because we think of them as not being the norm. In Jesus' life miracles are the norm, because he is "one" with the Father and works through the Holy Spirit. Miracles are not normal for us, because we are educated, have university degrees and believe that in order to succeed we have to do everything ourselves, and solve every problem. The result is that in most cases we fail and if we do succeed it is because we have walked over others, making us not very nice people.

"Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be open to you."

These are not Bill McGinty's words; these are Jesus Christ's words. They illustrate something that is demonstrated over and over in the first 400 years of the Christian church. "The words that you find in the pages of the Gospel referring to Jesus teaching have no significance until they are read, understood and then lived."

When we Christians want to know about the interpretation of scripture, we look to how it was lived by the Early Church. In doing so, we appeal to the earliest tradition of a church that was filled, inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit. We call it the "lived word of God", "the Kerygma," that which was preached and proclaimed. Put the words of Jesus together with the actions of people who lived in the Spirit, and then you have a Charismatic church, who believe that with God anything is possible. God will give you what you ask, as long as it supports the second line of Jesus' prayer.

"Thy Kingdom Come." We proclaim Christ's teaching that God's Kingdom may come to all mankind. The Holy Spirit will refuse nothing in that cause, but if it is "our own" Kingdom we are building, and not God's, I think he would have a problem with that. In Jesus' story God our Father does not give us what we want; he gives us the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us with the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and the love of our God.

We can read the scriptures forever, but until we are touched by the grace of God's Spirit, we are but ants trying to do the impossible. It is the grace of the Spirit flowing from the cross of Jesus that transforms our actions, because then the power of our God is the life blood driving us.

It is the difference between belief and non-belief. It is the difference between a church of faith and a social club. It is the difference between a struggling church and one that lives and thrives in the Spirit.

"All of this is yours," Jesus says. "As long as you repent from your sins and forgive others."

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For the Father that we pray to, is not a King sitting upon a throne. The image of the Father in Jesus' prayer is of the aging Father standing by the gate year after year waiting for the return of his boy; running to greet him with outstretched arms.

"Our God" Jesus teaches, is the forgiving parent, the one who cares, the one who loves, the one who protects from snake, scorpion or the evils of this world. And when he embraces and forgives us, what will he do? He will gown us with the robes of the Holy Spirit.

There is enormous comfort in today's Gospel. When I was 12, I was concerned about the Last Judgment, but it seemed a good way off. Nearing 60, and the way I have been driving lately, it seems now a lot closer; Jesus' prayer takes the sting and fear out of that encounter with God which we are all journeying towards. Jesus says: "Ask for forgiveness and you will be forgiven. Ask for a place in Christ's Kingdom and you will be given that place. Seek to be loved by God and he will embrace you and hold you in his eternal arms. Knock on his door and he will warmly enter you in."

That is the message of this gospel for all of us in the light of it I need to ask for your help. I think today's gospel is the story of our church from November 2002 when 4 of our members went down to Bethlehem, knocked on the Bishops door and said: "We need help."

From that day to this, our story has been the story of returning to the true mission and purpose of the founders of this parish.

No Priest or Rector could have asked and received greater support and effort; hard work and prayer from his people than you have given to me, the wardens and the Vestry over the last four years. It has been a story of growth and recovery.

At times it has burned people out and brought about a need for rest ad recuperation. That is the period that we are in just now. In the next year, we will enter the second stage of our growth and recovery. It will have nothing to do with Pipe Organs, maintenance or money. It will have everything to do with growing our Spirituality prayer life, worship liturgies and service.

It will begin in September with a Spiritual Program lasting 6 weeks, called the Parish Project; "Our True Story." I hope that as many of you as possible will take part in it.

It will entail one discussion evening a week for 6 weeks and participation in 6 special 10:00am Sunday services that are just a little bit different.

From these 6 weeks of prayer and worship it is my hope that we will grow a program that will enrich our worship and spiritual life together. I need your help to make that happen in three ways.

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- First, to record our recent story and what we learned from it.
- Second, to explore a new life of prayer and worship.
- Third to put in place a vision for the future and a way of fulfilling Christ's mission in this place that will go on after we are all gone.

To that end, I ask you to sign up for all or any of the dates in the bulletin flyer. I need 6 locations and volunteers to help me record this project.

This is about us, our story, our journey and our need to knock on heaven's door.  
Thank you so much.

Amen+

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