

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

3 Pentecost
June 25, 2006
Fr. Bill McGinty

“A Time to Fight and a Time to Renew”

If you, have been brought up by the sea you know all too well, about its fury and just how dangerous it can be, waves as high as houses breaking over rocks or jetties, winds that lash the shoreline and boats bobbing furiously at anchor. When the sea is running, there is no protection, you are going to get wet, and without due care, you can be killed. Today's Gospel story is a story of the sea. The Apostles are caught out in the open sea in a storm and although they are fishermen they are afraid. Jesus calms the storm and says to them: “Why are you afraid?” It is a question that he asks them many times, in the three years of his ministry. “Why are you afraid?”

We tend to forget that fear was so much a greater part of people's lives in Christ's day. They feared the dark, long journeys, the sea and spirits of all kinds.

Today's Gospel sends us this clear and distant message: “With Christ in our midst there is no need to fear.” Christ is the badge that we wear, his power and his spirit, are with us always. St Paul is convinced of this in today's reading from Corinthians. He claims that it is Christ who urges us on and it is Christ who makes everything new, especially us. “We are,” says Paul, “a new creation because of the death of Jesus.” That should have a special meaning for all of us who are older, for it means that all our mistakes, all our broken dreams, and missed opportunities, are wiped out. Christ has made us new again, and because of it, we have been reconciled with God our Father.

The last week I spent on a University college Campus in New Jersey. For me it was a déjà vu experience. The last time I had lived on campus was the spring of 1971. The dorms and rooms were much the same, and nothing much had changed. Notice boards were packed with career information, summer jobs and opportunities for traveling abroad. Some campus radio was playing Beatle songs and Eric Clapton, so it was hard to remember that it was no longer 1971 but 2006. That is, till I tried running to classes, with a bag full of books, climbing the stairs or getting through the lessons without falling asleep. Something was different, was it the 100 extra pounds, the grey hair and the extra 35 years? After two days, I climbed back in the car and drove across campus to class.

But there was also a serious side to my reflection this week, as I pondered on those 35 years and how they were spent. We can all look back to that day we left college with the world at our feet, our degree in a top pocket and hope in our hearts. Can you remember your hopes and dreams at the one time in your life, when anything was still possible?

Of course, life has a cruel way of taking the polish off our dreams, and work, responsibility and the demands of life can soon enslave us and slowly wear us down. Today's Gospel is a Gospel of hope to Christians in the early church and it should be a Gospel of hope for us too. 35 years later we are still alive and kicking and Jesus the Lord is still with us and an enormous part of our lives.

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Should we be afraid of the future? No! Would we want to go back and relive those 25 years? Absolutely not! The Gospel calls each of us to a new creation each and every day.

The story of Legion the Demoniac is an interesting story. In Mark's account he lives among the tombs. You have to remember that Mark himself lived in Rome among the Christians. He is writing his Gospel for them. The Christians also live among the tombs or at least that is where they meet deep underground in the Roman Catacombs or burial chambers. So we have to ask ourselves the question: "Is Mark writing in code?" Is this Gospel full of secret messages for persecuted Christians who are being terrorized, imprisoned and butchered on a daily basis by Nero the Mad Emperor and his Legends of soldiers?

If we translated Mark's Gospel story it would have to read something like this:

"Christians, listen, do not hide and do not be afraid. Jesus, who you love, has not deserted you. He lives and dwells among you. The Romans say, "You are crazies who live among the tombs." But you know that you have been saved by Jesus who makes all things whole. "Do not be afraid of those who can kill your bodies, but cannot kill your spirit. When the right time comes they will, like swine, be thrown into the sea. Go home to your friends and tell them what the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you."

This Gospel is not just for those Roman Christians it is also for each one of us. Sure from time to time. We too have been persecuted, ridiculed, pained and worn down. But in all that time we have never been deserted by the one who calls us to respond to his Gospel and his life.

The toughest part of last week was being away from home and the Parish for five whole days. Without familiar voices and faces it was so much more difficult to get through the day and evenings. We have all become that Christian family that Paul speaks of in Corinthians. People have asked me why do another course at this time in life. The answer is simple. Next January we will begin a project in the Parish that will lift our Parish Program to a new level. The work, methods and theories that we employ will benefit the worship and spiritual growth of people in the parish for generations. When it begins a team of you will map and plan a strategy for worship and spirituality that we can follow. It will extend into many areas of parish life including the web-site, the Internet, our youth activity and spiritual programs.

There are many things I would prefer to be doing in the next three weeks rather than attending classes and writing endless papers. But this is an investment in our future. That future was mentioned again last week at our National Convention in Ohio. There, delegates spoke of our need to grow churches and to Evangelize. It was a theme taken up by Bishop Paul in an e-mail to the Clergy on Friday. In it he stressed that this will be a priority for 2007. Already we as a Diocese have begun and in the Fall Nancy Holleran and Beth Grosso will lead us in a twin program to kick start Evangelism in the Parish.

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You will have read and heard in the Media that Convention elected a new Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. She is the Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori Bishop of Nevada. She is the 26th Presiding Bishop and the first woman to hold the post in 400years. Her term will begin on November 1, 2006. In her opening acceptance speech she drew from the words of Isaiah: ...“the poor are fed, the good news is preached, prisoners set free, the blind see, the lame walk. This is our mission, this is our purpose. We proclaim the inauguration of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Today at this Eucharist we pray for our new leader. We pray that the story of today's Gospel will inspire her in her mission to lead us her church. And it does inspire us, does it?. We think back to the early seventies and we think of the women who stood in rain, ridicule and storm that one day they too could stand and serve at the table of the Lord and we say, “thank you god for your tender mercies.”

Today, it is 1971 all over again, and as a church we do have the world at our feet. With that old Episcopal flag flying high we once again strap on the shield of our Lord Jesus Christ and venture out to fight the Good Fight. We hear Jesus' words “be not afraid” ringing in our ears and though our armor is a little old and a little rusty, we pray this prayer on this 3 Pentecost Sunday.

“Lord, be our shield and our strength that we may, serve you and fight the good fight till the day you come and we can rest at peace in the garden of your Kingdom.”

Amen+

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