

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

20 Pentecost
October 17, 2004
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Seeking the Truth”

Thirty years ago I was fascinated to learn that fact statements in philosophy could either be true or false and because of that were called “truth statements.” It seemed oddly contradictory to see “the earth is flat” as either a factual statement or a truth statement. But, apparently, any statement is a truth statement if it is verifiable. And, because today we can verify, “the earth is flat,” we can prove it one way or another, that makes it a truth statement. It does not matter that the statement: “the earth is flat is false.” The very fact that it can be true or false makes it a factual statement.

Philosophers also tell us that the statement, “Angels are good” is neither factual nor a truth statement because there is no way we can verify the word angel and we want to know and agree on what “good” means. Instead, they call these kinds of statements “value statements.” Truth statements can be proved; value statements cannot. That is not to say that value statements are not true; just that we can’t prove them. So Angels may exist and they may be good.

If you have followed this you will have seen that it is clear and obvious and even logical. If you have not, then you can join the majority of us who number ourselves among the happy, but confused.

Now the reason I begin like this today is because we all want to seek the truth; find the truth and even own the truth, but it is equally confusing. What is the truth? Law courts seek it. Newspapers declare it. At presidential debates we are told to sit back, listen and judge for ourselves. Immediately after, we are assaulted by spin doctors from both sides who want to make sure that we got the truth, their truth and if we didn’t they will tell us.

The truth is hard to ascertain, not because it isn’t there, but because we all carry so much baggage when we are seeking it.

In last weeks Times Herald Record, three full pages were devoted to clergy who preach politics from the pulpit and attempt to tell their congregation members how to vote. The search for truth can never be so important that people have to be told how to vote. God gave us a brain so we could make up our own mind. How do you get to be so arrogant that you decide that your Congregation are not capable of making up their own minds on how to vote?

I answered this question for myself by rationalizing that these were extreme Right-wing conservative groups who can’t be expected to behave any better and were prisoners of their own narrow outlook.

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This seemed a suitable explanation till Thursday's papers recorded a Catholic Bishop in Colorado instructing Catholics that they cannot vote for John Kerry because of his stance on life issues.

Thomas Aquinas, seven hundred years ago laid down the basis of the Church's moral law. He claimed it could be discovered in the marriage of faith and reason and he called it Natural Law. It has stood ever since. For any Bishop or Priest to tell his congregation what is right or wrong is to replace a God given faculty; the ability to decide right from wrong. And that is before we even comment on the fact that this is America, the land of the free, the birthplace of Liberty, the very cornerstone of our Constitutional Democracy.

If there was a rumor of a slight earthquake in the middle of Orange County, N.Y. last week, and there was, it was nothing to do with geology; it was our founding fathers turning in their graves.

No wonder we have a Constitution that legally separates Church and State. Oh that Churchmen would read the Constitution as well as their Bible. It was after all, written by Godly men.

Friday and Saturday the Diocese of Bethlehem assembled at the Cathedral of the in Nativity Bethlehem for its Annual Convention.

The Bishop, presiding instructed us on the healthy state of the Diocese and the many wonderful pastoral programs being developed. He has seen positive signs of growth and enormous good will, especially among the laity of the Diocese.

Foremost in this year's achievements has been the response to the desperate situation our brothers and sisters in Kajo Keji have found themselves in. The Diocese of Bethlehem, or rather you the people of the parishes, have raised 75 thousand dollars, with money still coming in! The money we have transferred to the Sudan will help feed many people until the rains next April. Particularly, they wanted to buy seed because they are a proud, and self-reliant people, who want to look after themselves.

In January, Bishop Paul and Diane will fly to Kajo Keji, and he begs you in the interim, to continue to support our relief effort.

Among the resolutions passed by Convention, the following are of note and interest. The Canons and Constitution of the Diocese of Bethlehem will be amended in the following way:

1. The Bishop can suspend the Vestry and Clergy of a parish that refuses to pay or withholds its assessment. He can designate a new Vestry or persons to run the Parish. The Parish's mission may be dissolved and the Parish closed. If refusal continues by Convention, the Church Property and assets will revert to the Diocese. The Bishop could re-establish the church as a mission. Passed.

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2. The Diocese of Bethlehem is now incorporated. Passed.
3. Resolution E asked for the Convention to repudiate the 74th National Convention on the election of a gay Bishop and same sex blessings. It was defeated.
4. Resolution F called for National Delegates to 2006 Convention to be prepped as to the major issues. It was defeated.
5. The resolution to re-vamp the “Great Commission and Evangelism in our parish’s was passed.
6. Resolution J was the Diocesan budget. It made the Assessment 12%. Passed.

All in all, the Convention worked hard and dealt with the matters at hand in a professional and serious capacity, as did your delegates.

Let us pray that the outcome of this 133rd Convention will bear much fruit in the coming year.

Amen +