

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

21 Pentecost
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Fr. Bill McGinty

“I do it for Jesus!”

On the 24th of October 1804, the British Fleet sailed out of Gibraltar Harbor to meet the French and Spanish Fleets at Trafalgar. It was the greatest naval engagement the world had ever seen. As the wind filled the sails and rigging of the ships they call “Men of War” the whole of Europe held its breath. At stake was the future of democracy, the invasion of England and the end of the Mother of Parliaments. With the great Napoleon Bonaparte’s army mustered and ready at Calais, only the outcome of this great naval battle would determine who ruled the waves and ultimately whether a French or British flag would fly over a London sky.

On spotting the French Fleet the British Admiral Horacio Nelson sent this message to all his ships: “England expects every man to do his duty.” The rest is history. In a fierce battle, the English Warship Victory, smashed through the French line, cutting the enemy Fleet in two. The English gunners, working feverishly, got off two rounds of canon to the French one, blowing away the enemy’s masts and destroying their ability to maneuver. The battle lasted four and a half hours and when it ended, the French and Spanish ships were either sunk, on fire or fled the fight. On the quarter deck of the Victory Nelson lay mortally wounded from a musket shot by a sniper. With his officers around him he asked how the battle had gone. On being told it had been won, he turned to his second in command and said: “Kiss me Hardy!” and died.

Across England from the White Cliffs of Dover to the Downs of Kent, to the farthest hill in Scotland, beacon fires were lit spreading the news of Nelson’s victory. People left their work, in towns and villages, street parties appeared everywhere and continued long into the night. William Pitt the Prime Minister declared October 24 Trafalgar Day and commissioned a Square Pillar and Statue of Nelson to be erected in the center of London.

To this day British sailors still receive rations of rum on Trafalgar Day and toast Nelson and his memory.

Two hundred years have passed since Horacio Nelson stood on the quarter deck of the Victory and sent his celebrated signal to the Fleet. In Trafalgar Square his Pillar and Statue rises for over one hundred feet above the city, respected by all except the pigeons. In St Paul’s Cathedral Crypt, Nelson’s body rests in a place of honor. Across his marble tomb are scrolled the words: “England expects...”

Pondering all of this, I thought to think of how we celebrate and commemorate famous men, and women too, for that matter.

George Washington has a state and a city named after him, and many towns. His head appears on bank notes, coins and stamps. Benjamin Franklin has towns and villages and similar head appearances as does Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln who also gets a

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monument all to himself. When John Kennedy died in 1963, we named an airport after him and a space center. On his grave we burnt an eternal flame at Arlington and stamps, coins and High Schools all commemorate him in some way.

Famous women are harder to find among monuments or on bank notes. They do not get a place on Mount Rushmore, rarely get buried at Arlington and few cities are named after them; if anyone knows any I'm prepared to stand corrected. There are exceptions of course. Virginia was named for Elizabeth the First, the Virgin Queen who sent Walter Raleigh to Jamestown. Maryland was, I believe named for the wife of an English King but with the Carolina's I am lost.

We have Colleges like Seton Hall named for Elizabeth Seton, but no one seems to remember Florence Nightingale anymore or Eleanor Roosevelt, or other female giants of the 19th & 20th centuries.

All of this had me thinking about Jesus and how we commemorate him. What place does he find in our society and how important is he to people and their lives? Putting aside churches and colleges and the place he holds among Christians, I tried to think about his role in the rest of our national life. We don't have any states named after him, although cities founded by missionaries in the 17th Century, mostly in the West have Jesus connections, such as: Corpus Christi, Sacramento, Los Angeles, Santa Fe to name a few. Still if you stopped a hundred kids in the street I doubt that they would be able to make a religious connection. I can't think of a National Monument to Jesus and his head doesn't appear on a coin, a stamp or a bank note.

Constitutionalists will of course say: "Proper order. We have a separation of Church and State after all!"

For us Christians our view of the world is of course different. We see Jesus at every turn. We celebrate him throughout the year. Holidays are also Holy Days for us; such that Christmas, Easter and even Thanksgiving have enormous religious significance and impact on us. We live a calendar year that follows Jesus' life and teaching. And we try as best we can to emulate his life and actions, incorporating his teaching in all that we do. Take Jesus out of our lives and the landscape of our life would be as empty as the countryside without trees. Take Jesus out of history and beautiful churches disappear in every town and city. Can you imagine Montreal without its churches? Take Jesus out of history, and monasteries disappear and with them books and art, universities and so much learning. Music has to be written down by someone else without finding its Genesis in plain chant, and church music. Mozart, Bach, Brahms, Hayden and Handel are forced to find some other inspiration for their great musical masterpieces.

Take Jesus out of history and our annual holidays including Christmas disappear and our lives take on the same gray boring landscape of a George Orwell novel like "1984."

Jesus inspires. He has always inspired. He inspires the great Art of the Middle Ages and the Great Philosophers such as Anselm, Peter Abelard, and Thomas Aquinas. You have to

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marvel at the Sistine Chapel, even if you know Michael Angelo was a bad tempered, womanizing drunk or that Pope Julian II was a war mongering crazy man.

Jesus inspires such that we can amid the civistication of the 20th Century we wonder at the works of a little Albanian Nun in Calcutta, India working amid dirt and depravation that none of us ever gets to experience. She replied to the British broadcaster Malcolm Muggeridge who asked her; “Why do you do it? Why do you spend your life in this way?”

She replied: “I do it for Jesus!”

“I do it for Jesus,” could and should be a motto for all and any Christian church that strives to live by his teaching.

And maybe it is here amid the nakedness of that statement; “I do it for Jesus!” that we best see the real monument to Christ that we should build in our lives. In our hearts we all know a profound truth. That no matter how beautiful are the churches we build, how magnificent and majestic the building we chose to worship in, Jesus is not interested in buildings or monuments. Jesus is interested in actions. “What did you do in response to my command to you?”

For I said, ‘feed my lambs, feed my sheep.’ How did you remember me by making my command a moral imperative in your life? Did you see the hungry and feed them? Did you look to the poor and clothe them? Did you reach out to the suffering and bring comfort?

It is no coincidence that last week at Convention Bishop Paul announced: “the best thing we did in the last year was reach out to our brothers and sisters in Kajo Keji in their time of need.” Do you know that when we hold a flea market that we are not just trying to make money? Making money is good because we can finance other ministries with it, but when we hold a flea market we have other motivations as well.

1. Flea markets help poor families, down on their luck or facing unemployment. Flea markets are where you get some basic stuff when you are divorced and living in a one bedroom apartment. Flea markets are great if you are young, single with a kid.
2. Flea markets give us the opportunity to serve our church and our local community.
3. Flea markets allow we that have too much to share our wealth, be it coats, shoes or simply things that are good and have long life left in them, but we have no use for anymore. When the kids have grown and gone, there are things left behind other poor kids can use. Maybe we would say; “we would do that anyway. This is America, we look after our own.”

Well, sometimes we do, when we think about it, when life is treating us good. We take care of others then. But Jesus tells us to do it always. He makes it a command. “If you love me,

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this is what you will do. You will make looking after the less fortunate a way of life. That is your monument to me.”

Jesus’ words in the Gospel narrative when he relates the parable of the sheep and the goats should forever haunt our mind a Christians.

“When I was hungry you did not give me food; when I was naked you did not clothe me; when I mourned you did not comfort; when I was sick and imprisoned you did not visit me.”

As Christians we cannot afford to be negative on any of these hallmarks of salvation. We can never pass up on the opportunity to do what Jesus would do.

Today’s Gospel, the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee in the Temple, is the story of all of us. We are one or the other. We are either thumping our chests and telling God how great we are or we are acknowledging ourself as sinners and asking for forgiveness in a spirit of true humility. There is no in between, you cannot be half a Christian; nor a part-time Christian. You can only be, and only live under one life altering conviction; “Jesus is the Lord of my life; he is my personal savior, all I will do and can do, I do for and because of him.”

If we could do that, if we could live our life for the Lord, if we could be that living monument by our actions then with St Paul today we could say the words: “My life is poured out as a libation; I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race, I have kept the faith:

Pray that prayer! Own those words, and you will never ever have to worry about growing old. Grey hair, white hair, no hair will not matter, for on the other side of midnight stands your Christ with arms extended to greet you. To hug you to himself, to say; “Come to me, blessed of my father and take the place reserved for you in my Kingdom For I was hungry and you fed me; I was naked and you clothed me; I mourned and you comforted me; I was imprisoned and you visited me.”

And you will say, “When did I do all that” and he will say “when you did it for the least of these my little ones, you did it to me.”

Let us pray.

Lord, tear down the monument that I have built to myself with my false pride. Tear down the fear I have built up about getting my hands dirty among your poor. Lift up my eyes to see the opportunities you present to me on a daily basis to walk where you walked, to heal those you healed, to feed those who need feeding, to comfort the lost, befriend the lonely, nurse the afflicted. Then in the shadow of the evening of our lives, we will see you walk, not before or behind us but at our side, into that good night, where your love paves the dawn of our salvation.

Amen +

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