

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

23 Sunday Pentecost
October 28, 2007
Fr. Bill McGinty
8:00am

“Happy Sunday/Dark Monday”

The Prophet Joel lived after the Jewish exile. He saw his job as preparing for the future coming of God’s salvation. His prophecy was both woeful and also optimistic. He attempted to teach Israel the error of her ways, which had led to her downfall and long Exile. At the same time, he looked to the children as offering hope in a brighter future.

“The future,” said Joel “could go either way.” Israel could learn from her sins and mistakes or she could repeat them. Either way, there would come a day of reckoning, a day to terrify the hearts of men, that day he called: “the Day of the Lord.” Before the Exile, “the Day of the Lord” was always considered as a day of “triumph and glory,” when all Israel’s enemies would be destroyed in one great battle. Joel puts the phrase to a new meaning: “the Day of the Lord would be a day of judgment for Israel also.”

Joel 2: 28 has become one of the most famous passages in the Old Testament:

“I will pour out my spirit on all flesh your sons and your daughters will
prophecy.
Your old men will dream dreams
And your young men shall see visions.
Even on the male and female slaves.
In those days, I will pour out my Spirit.”

Scholars have speculated and argued about this passage and its meaning for centuries. Was it referring to the fall and destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD? Or perhaps it was foretelling the end of the world? Or again was Joel prophesying our individual death, when each of us will be held accountable for our life and the way we have lived it?

Two thousand five hundred years after Joel and his writing, we are still faced with the question: “Has this world got a future? Or faced with violence, corruption, war and the problems of poverty, disease and over population, are we indeed facing the Day of the Lord.”

Bishop Paul visiting our parish today is deeply aware of the problems and the growing divide between rich and poor especially in places such as Africa.

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The problems are so enormous that the temptation is to say: “What could we ever do that would make the slightest difference in this situation? Pouring money into here, is like pouring a bottle of water on the Sahara Desert and expecting something to grow.”

Visiting Sudan with his wife Diane, 2 years ago, Paul saw all these problems for himself. He does not claim that he had a blinding vision, or a dream that he and the Diocese of Bethlehem would overnight make all things right. Instead he claims that his heart was won over by the great faith of the beautiful people of Kajo Kegi and the joy of their children.

In page three of the November issue of *the Cobblestone* I write about Bishop Paul’s visit to Kajo Kegi and his New Hope Campaign. So far it has raised 2.4 million dollars from the 67 parishes. During the 6 weeks of the Parish Project we raised \$1600 for Kajo Kegi, which we shall present to the Bishop today at the Bishop Dinner. I will invite the parish to make this campaign a special place in our prayer each week as the Diocese creeps closer to its target.

Jesus in today’s Gospel tells the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple. It is a story that was not addressed to Pharisees. It was addressed to those “who exalt themselves and count themselves better than everyone else.”

We are all tempted to see ourselves as the tax collector and not as the Pharisee and most of us probably have more in common with the Pharisee rather than the tax collector. We do not care to be identified as a rogue, a thief or an adulterer. While we might not fast very often, we do go to church on a regular basis and we give money when asked. And despite this parable, we all feel pretty good about it. I was giving myself that kind of pat on the back last Monday evening when a telephone call came into my home in Matamoros.

I was feeling pretty good about the completion of the 6 weeks of the Parish Project. I was ecstatic about our response to Kajo Kegi. I was greatly encouraged by the vestry’s adoption of the shared Ministry Schema and absolutely delighted at the return of the St John’s window. I was feeling more righteous than the poor Pharisee in the story and I thought with just cause.

My wife rarely picks up the phone if I am in the house, because most calls are church calls. So when the telephone rang at 6:26 I picked it up and looked at the Caller ID. It said “Private Caller”. Any call with “Private Caller” is nearly always our daughter Paula, so I handed the phone to Maryann.

I knew it was not Paula, when I heard Maryann say: “Who is this?” She immediately handed the telephone back to me and I asked “whose calling?”

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“XXXXX” came back the reply. “Bill, I want you to listen careful to what I have to say and nothing up until I have finished” said the man’s voice. Then he went on.

You are not just any pastor; you wear a cross around your neck with something on it. You are a \$%#@#\$% scumbag of a pastor. Your church is falling down and everyone is leaving. You bad mouth everyone who leaves your church, you scumbag. You are going to burn in hell. Very soon you will be face down in the dirt with a bullet in your head when I next meet you and you will be dead. Then you will burn in hell, you \$#@&@^% scumbag.

With that XXXX hung up.

Maryann and I sat looking at each other in shocked amazement. I have been around the world a few times and in 59 years I have never heard anything like that.

We phoned the police who took 15 minutes to identify the caller, the address on and the telephone number of the caller.

To date no arrests have been made, no charges have been brought and the individual and his partner, are walking around Milford free.

Meanwhile, Maryann and I have been double locking every door, checking out every car and truck on the street, looking our for 6 foot middle aged men with salt and pepper hair and a possible beard.

Suddenly, we are not feeling so righteous, justified or happy. I tell you all this for two reasons. First, because we were unsure whether to open the church up for services today after receiving what the police themselves called a terrorist death threat. Secondly, it illustrates how rapidly things change in church life. Sunday you are feeling great, Monday you are double locking the doors, wondering whether you should buy a gun, and checking under the bed.

“All who exalt themselves will be humbled says today’s Gospel, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

St Paul writing to Timothy in the 2nd reading is also thinking about death and how his life is ebbing away.

“I am already being poured out as a libation,” he says, “and the time of my departure has come.”

Paul puts his trust and faith in his Christ, who he says stood by him and gave him strength.

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“The Lord” he says, “will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly Kingdom.”

I think that when we too receive attacks of this nature, we should see them as a sign that a church and parish we are doing something good, otherwise they would not come.

Let us in this Eucharist pray for these two individuals and ask God to lead them to his salvation. Let us also pray for God’s protection for all members of the parish and their families.

Amen+