

13 Pentecost  
August 30, 2009  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## “The Love of His Name”

“Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your name increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness and bring forth in us the fruit of good works.”

So begins the Collect Prayer for today’s 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost service. It was written by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer nearly 500 years ago. Cranmer’s prayer expresses the Christian truth that we ought to love God and his holy name. There is a feeling that can sweep over you when you are standing singing great hymns at the Diocesan Convention Eucharist. It is a feeling of belonging-belonging to something greater, belonging to a tradition. Five hundred voices raised praising God and the sight of that old red crossed Episcopal flag and you are one with men and women around the country and around the world. To belong to an army that daily sets out to do all those things that Jesus demands in his Gospel to feed the poor; heal the sick; right the wrong and set the downtrodden free; is a collective source of pride and honor felt by all Christians.

The goodness and true religion invoked in Cranmer’s prayer is the heart of all we believe. We believe in a good God worshiped by a good people.

I like to remind myself of the fact that being Christian is a ‘feel good’ experience. It is a worthy way to live our lives.

Today’s first reading from the Song of Solomon has always been regarded as one of the great love poems of the Old Testament. Yet it is also deeply Messianic, when we refer it to the Risen Christ. It is Christ who is our risen hero, who transforms the landscape of our lives with the good news of salvation. Christ has put his mark on each one of us, it is the sign of the cross, it is the symbol of love. How we live our lives is marked by that identity that we belong to Christ.

Our second reading mentions this when James tells us: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this; to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

That is hard to do, as we all know. It is all too easy to be seduced by the world and all that it offers. We are surrounded on a daily basis by wealth, advertizing, ambition and everything the world values. Yet Christians need to remain true to Gospel values while living in that world.

Jesus in the Gospel today is confronted by Scribes and Pharisees who point fingers at his followers accusing them of not been true to Judaism and the Jewish law.

Jesus will have none of it. He insists that religion is something of the heart. Christianity is a faith of the heart. As knowledgeable as we may want to be about our faith and its theology, the essence of Christ’s teaching is that “love” trumps everything else.

Love demands that forgiveness, kindness and understanding become an intrical part of our lives. But as Jesus tells his followers over and over, “it is easy to love those who love you,” The Gospel demands that we love those who hate and despise us, those who would go to any lengths to undo everything we strive to build and everything we cherish.

Christians are people who cannot separate who they are as Christians, and who they are as citizens. That at times, places us on the horns of a dilemma, because our faith teaches us that we cannot hate those who oppose our views, even politically. Democrat or Republican we have to continue to love even those we so adamantly disagree with. Many years ago Americans of both parties had a common enemy in Communism. Communists and their philosophy was a common hate whether you were Democrat or Republican. Today, with that common enemy gone, it is easy to forget that we are all American and the reason that we can disagree and hold opposing views lies enshrined in the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Christians, to stay Christian must love all people, fight for the rights of all people, care for all people. Christians pray for their enemies, be they Russian, Moslem or Terrorist, that God's redeeming love may enter their lives too and bring them peace and salvation.

It is much harder to find love and forgiveness than the weight of these words. Those who have suffered loss from crime, violence, war, terrorism, theft or greed will testify to that.

Yet, the story of Jesus is the story of someone abused, demeaned, punished unjustly, condemned and ridiculed, yet did not hit back.

This week I watched a TV program that ridiculed all religion and Christianity in particular as stupid, useless, unfounded and deeply damaging to us as a nation.

Reflecting on that attack, I realized that the beauty essence and compassion of faith and people of faith is all too easily lost to the atheist. To them it is a foreign language and one they cannot understand.

Love, truth, service, understanding and virtue are gifts that God gives us and that Jesus amplifies and teaches in and through his life.

We too cannot take them for granted. We cannot take all that we value for granted. As Americans we cannot take our freedoms for granted and as Christians we cannot take the Gospel, church, faith and God for granted.

The answer is to love. To love God. Love faith, love our church and glory in the title Christian. To wear it with pride as we would a medal of honor. To look right and left at those who worship with us and see them with the eyes of the heart, as people we love, cherish and hold dear, because they too wear the title of Christian.

We have come to a critical time in the life and history of our parish and its faith story. Behind us stretches a road that many of you have traveled and experienced.

In recent years we have buried so many who carried the church and its mission this far. Pastoral visits, tell us that a whole generation who sustained the church for so many years are either no longer with us, or are no longer able to carry the burden of the work that needs to be done.

Who will carry the church, its mission and its ministries forward in the years to come? Who will step forward and volunteer to do the work of Christ in this place?

From Vestry to Sunday School, youth work to Pastoral visits to the sick, the shut-in, the hospital or prison Christ needs the stewardship of service that comes from Christians who live by the generosity of their hearts.

In the weeks to come I ask you to pray with me that God will recognize the gifts of discipleship he has planted in the hearts of many of you and that thro his grace you recognize that it is your time to stand and serve his Gospel in this church. And in serving he will bless you with the gifts of his Spirit.

Amen+