

7 Easter  
May 16, 2010  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## **“The Bishop is Coming”**

Today is Ascension Day Sunday when we celebrate the feast of the Ascension, Jesus leaving his disciples, but first commissioning them to continue his work and his saving ministry.

He tells them in Luke's Gospel:

“This it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things, and see I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Then he led them as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.

Samuel Seabury was the first Bishop of the Episcopal Church. Until 1783, there were no Anglican Bishops in North America, resulting in all ordinations having to be conducted in England. In a bid to retain power in America, the Church of England refused to ordain Bishops for the former colonies. Seabury traveled in 1783 to Scotland, where the 8 Church of Scotland ordained him a bishop.

The church here in North America, then sent William White and Samuel Provoost to be ordained Bishop. With these three ordinations, the church lost its dependence on England and the church of England and became an independent church in its own rite. Why this was important revolves around the fact that 2/3 of the leaders of the 1776 Revolution had an affiliation with the Old Anglican Church of North America. The new church of Seabury, White and Provoost called itself Episcopal from the Greek work for bishop or leader Episcopoi.

Becoming a church led by Bishops was enormously important to Anglicans in North America. They believed in two Creeds, the Apostles Creed and the Creed of Nicaea. Both speak of the church being an Apostolic Church.

That means that they believed that Christ handed on his work and ministry to his Apostles and disciples and they in turn laid hands on others giving them the power of the Holy Spirit. This Apostolic Succession, kept the Christian of North America closely bound to 1700 years of Christian tradition. It also tied them to the believe of their cousins in the Orthodox churches Russian, Greek and Ukrainian and in a purely spiritual way to the Anglican and Roman churches.

What the early fathers were saying was:

“Politics and war may have driven us apart but we still believe in the same things as our brothers and sisters across the seas.”

With three bishops, the Episcopal Church was able to ordain priests and bishops so that by 1789 it held its first convention in Philadelphia. There it established a house of bishops and a house of deputies, revised the Book of Common Prayer and drew up the Constitution. It took two hundred years for the church to establish its first woman bishop Barbara Harris in Massachusetts in 1989. By that time, leading Episcopalians had influenced American life in a profound way:

Absalom Jones had become the first black priest ordained in 1804, fifty years before the Civil War. Harriet Beecher Stowe, author abolitionist and Episcopalian wrote "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in 1852 prompting Abraham Lincoln to say to her: "So you are the little woman that started this great war."

Men and women who wanted this authentic connection with Christ and the Apostles wished to base their faith on Scripture, tradition and reason. In doing so they knew that the traditions of their faith, the values of their Christianity and the principles of their Anglican tradition would be protected by a Constitution that allowed them to participate, and by their Bishops and lay deputies who cared for their interest. Many great Americans have found in the Episcopal Church a way of following Christ and serving his Gospel, including:

Thurgood Marshall first African American to serve on the Supreme Court; Gerald Ford, President of the United States; Eleanor Roosevelt, first lady, reformer and US delegate to the United Nations, responsible for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court. They are not alone: in the literary world John Steinbeck, Madeline L'Engle, William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams and John Updike were all great Episcopalians. Robin Williams, Judy Garland, Courtney Cox, Bono, Rosanne Cash, Sam Waterston, Fred Astaire, Judy Collins, Cecil B. DeMille have all served in the Episcopal Church, giving us great PR and inspiration.

We belong to a church of diversity where many people, from so many walks of life have found a home and shade from rejection, persecution and much more. It is an umbrella that is wide and large enough to allow all who wish to enter in. Episcopalians have a natural bias towards the underdog, the lost, those in trouble or suffering in any way. Episcopalians live by the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount as found in Matthew 5.

Next week, May 23, our Bishop will be present here with us at the 10 o'clock service. He represents that unbroken line back to the Apostles and Christ. He unites us in one common mission. It is the mission and agenda of Jesus and his Gospel. We belong to a Diocesan Community of Faith. Never in the last two hundred and fifty years has that community acted as one, as it has under Bishop Paul in the last two years.

4.3 million dollars has been raised by the 67 parishes to rebuild the churches and schools of Kego Keji in the Sudan. 100,000 dollars has been distributed in 2009 and 2010 to ministries directed dealing with the poor, in NE Pennsylvania. Projects related to the homeless, feeding the poor and the protection of the weak and the abused have been the hallmarks of this bishop's term of office.

In 2000, the diocese lent us \$14,000 for our heating system. In 2005, 2006 and 2007 the Bishop gave us \$35,000 to start the return to full time rector ship and re-growth. It was the faith bishop Paul had in Good Shepherd and its people that gave us the opportunity to acquire the Schantz Pipe Organ in 2007.

Here in 2010 with the organ  $\frac{3}{4}$  paid or and obvious growth in every aspect of church ministry and life. We all have to remember that we do belong to the Body of Christ as represented by the Diocesan community.

Next week the Bishop wears three symbols of his office, his MITRE, Crosier, and his ring. His MITRE or hat links him with the earliest of bishops; his Crosier is really a shepherd crook that tells us he is the 'shepherd of this flock.'

His ring is symbolic of his marriage covenant with this diocese, that he is committed to serving all his days and to the best of his ability.

I hope that you will gather at 10 AM with the rest of the diocese to welcome and greet Bishop Jack on his first visit to the parish. Through confirmation and the reception of new members, he will pray for the continuing mission of this church and its people.

Amen+