

Homily for WillanWest, First in Series, January 27, 2018

All Saints Church, San Diego
Festal Mass for St. John (“Chrysostom”) of Constantinople
The Rev. Robert G. Eaton, Celebrant and Preacher

Jesus said, let your light so shine before men. (Matthew)

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen

Given the option by Ruben, I’ve chosen to preach a homily, although I’m severely limiting the time of preaching this evening. But if I did not bring forward the Gospel and commend it to you by preaching at all, I would risk incurring the heavy presence of the soul of St. John, Archbishop and patriarch of Constantinople, until I did. I don’t know about Healey Willan’s response to no sermon or homily. I’m going to venture that he would not be happy without the extra preparation time to get ready for the Creed and Offertory Anthem!

One of my favorite stories about John the priest in Antioch after 12 years is how he was chosen through the emperor to be the Archbishop of the arguable center of the Roman Empire, a Patriarchy in a city with some say 100,000 Christian laity, and hundreds of diocesan officers and other ordained clergy. From a guy who would have rather have been out in the desert practicing ascetic spirituality, he didn’t want it, he didn’t look for it, and quite obviously was not trained for that kind of corporate venture.

It is a story reminiscent of how Ambrose of Ambrose was elected against his will, as well, but Ambrose’s story is much more civil in its telling. The story about John is that in early 398, John was taken by a senior military official to a chapel outside the walls of the city of Antioch (Syrian). There he was seized by soldiers and transported 800 miles to the capital, where he was forcibly consecrated as archbishop of Constantinople.

Well... so much for a search and discernment process.

On the other hand, Healey Willan, who composed music as much as Priest and Archbishop John wrote and preached sermons, but still best known for his [religious music](#), also made a long trek, but voluntarily. With a discovered love

January 27, 2018

for the Tractarians and their birthing of the Anglo-Catholic spirituality, he left England and went to Canada to teach. After only a year there in Toronto he was invited to also be the organist and choir director at St. Mary Magdalene, and as it turned out, for the rest of his career. From here St Mary's -- primarily due to his music and directing and teaching -- became a pilgrimage site for North American choral and Anglican church musicians. He even got himself on a Canadian postage stamp, such was his influence.

It was a popular response to John of Antioch, then John of Constantinople, very eloquent preaching that brought so many to wherever he preached. And it wasn't high-falutin' words or allegorical relishes that gained his influence. It was his love for the Scripture to be taught and preached well, and for wanting every person who heard him to walk away not influenced by HIM but influenced by the presence of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Scriptures./

He had a great love as a pastor, and this suited him well. I don't know about his personal demeanor, but it is clear that when we was with official folks and emperors and empresses and those with much money, he was often so straight forward as to offend. I believe he offended the empress so much on one occasion that just like that other John, she wanted his head on a platter. I believe he told her that she had a Jezebel spirit in her which needed to change. The emperor escorted him out and banished him for the second time.

Healey's light also shown in writing music, but especially as he demanded excellence, but not without leaving behind the people in the pew, just as John wanted greater lay participation. In the liturgy.

Healey clearly had a sense of his own personality and coping skills.

It is said that people at St Mary Mag's liked to moderate his somewhat dourly pious public image by quoting him as to his provenance: "English by birth; Canadian by adoption; Irish by extraction; Scotch by absorption."

There is a convergence of similarities, which is not necessary, but it is a lovely way to begin this series with saint and parish musician. The liturgy of the Divine Office attributed to John is still in use in Orthodoxy; the singing of the service by Willan is what so many like myself cut their eyeteeth on early in life, and still be used today. Everybody knows it.

What can be said is the same: over a long career you see the touch of God's grace brought to the life of the church, and in many ways so common to both, in the liturgy and thus the worship of the church.

January 27, 2018

This means that their lives and ministries are in fulfillment of the teaching of Christ, when he was talking to his disciples about the basics of Being a disciple of Jesus, Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and – what – turn to you O candle and say nice work? Great light? Good wax? -- no, that they may glorify your Father which is in heaven. Not for your sake, but for the sake of others to be brought into the same Body of Christ. That's what St. John said about the Bee, and thus the symbol attributed to him.

Where do you begin to do the same? Shining light for Christ? It starts with your own presentation of the good news of Jesus Christ, and then it grows from there. You don't come out of the womb as an archbishop, and you don't start kindergarten as a world famous organist and choir director.

Two questions for your reflection:

- In what ways do you “labor for others”?
- As Paul would exhort, what is that YOU have been given to shine with the light of Christ.

St. John of Constantinople, aka S John Chrysostom, had these final words for you in your discernment as the light of Christ . His final words were "Glory be to God for all things!"

In the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.