

FOR ALL THE SAINTS



December 2016 | January 2017

A publication of ALL SAINTS' CHURCH: *An Anglo-Catholic Parish in the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego*



ON THE COVER: Oil painting—Madonna, The Virgin Mary with sleeping baby Jesus.

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RECTOR'S MESSAGE

As We Prepare For Our Lord's Birth

Beloved in Christ,

For many of us, December and January can be so busy that it's easy for things to get lost in the shuffle, and, since our newsletter is no different, here are some things that I wanted to make sure to emphasize.

The first thing is our Christmas Mass schedule. As we have in the past, we will have 2 vigil Masses (4:00 and 11:00 PM) on Christmas Eve and another on Christmas morning at 10:00, which will stay the same even though Christmas falls on a Sunday this year. We'll return to our regular schedule the following Sunday, January 1st, for our celebration of the Feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus.

The second is our Annual Parish Meeting on Sunday, January 22nd. Please note that all members are expected to attend because there are business items that, as a parish, we are required by the church canons to accomplish, one of which being the election of new Vestry members. If you are interested in serving on the Vestry, please complete a nomination form, available on the tables in the front and back of the church.

Finally, I'm happy to share that we will have our rector emeritus, Fr. Tony Noble, on several occasions early in 2017, beginning with our Societies of Mary Mass on Saturday, January 7th and our celebration of the Baptism of Jesus the following day. Fr. will be back with us again for Candlemas (February 2nd) and our Sunday observance of it (February 5th), and then possibly sometime in March, so stay tuned!

May the Almighty God scatter the darkness from before your path as you prepare for our Lord's birth, and may his coming fill you with joy and make you heralds of his gospel.

In His mercy,



PARISH LIFE

Fall Pledge Drive Update!

The fall pledge drive at All Saints' reflects our belief that stewardship is an ongoing, year-round activity of thanksgiving for God's gifts. The purpose of this campaign is to give all members and friends of the parish an opportunity to make a pledge to support our ministries for the coming year and to have that commitment reflected in the annual parish budget to be adopted by the Vestry at its December meeting.

This year we kicked off the stewardship campaign with a parish-wide brunch following the celebration of the Mass for All Saints' Sunday on October 30. Adopting the theme, "Behold I have set before you an open door" (Revelation 3:8), Fr. McQueen encouraged us to discern the doors opened to us through our lives as members of All Saints' Parish. More specifically, he reported on the two-year pilot program adopted by the Vestry to open doors to connect more closely our parish and preschool communities.

The in-gathering of pledges this year falls primarily on the five Sundays leading up to our celebration of The Nativity of our Lord at Christmas. As of the First Sunday in Advent (November 27), we had received 22 pledges for a total of \$61,190. Pledges submitted through the Fourth Sunday in Advent (December 18) will be reflected in the parish budget for 2017. You may drop your completed pledge forms in the offering plates on Sunday or send them to the parish office (All Saints' Episcopal Church, 625 Pennsylvania Avenue, San Diego, CA 92103-4321; Fax: 619-298-7801). If needed, additional pledge forms are available on the table at the rear of the church or from the office.

Ed Heck

PARISH CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| 2 | Morning Prayer | 9:00am |
| | Mass | 9:30am |
| 3 | Societies of Mary | 11:00am |
| | <i>All are welcome to join the Societies of Mary for their monthly day of devotion, beginning in the Chapel with Rosary at 11:00am with Mass to follow. After which we will adjourn to the Parish Hall for a potluck luncheon.</i> | |
| 6 | Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, c. 342 | |
| | Mass | Noon |
| 9 | Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (tr.) | |
| | Morning Prayer | 9:00am |
| | Mass | 9:30am |
| 13 | Lucy, Martyr in Sicily, 304 | |
| | Mass | Noon |
| | Finance Committee Meeting | 6:00pm |
| 16 | Morning Prayer | 9:00am |
| | Mass | 9:30am |

PARISH CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December

18	Concert – Christmas Bells! <i>for Cellos and Choir</i>	5:00pm
20	St. Thomas the Apostle (tr.)	
	Mass	Noon
	Vestry Meeting	7:00pm
24	Christmas Eve (The Nativity of Our Lord)	
	Vigil Mass	4:00pm
	Carols	10:30pm
	Solemn Mass	11:00pm
	Christmas Eve Cookie Party	12:00am
25	Christmas Day	
	Sung Mass with Hymns	10:00am
26	<i>Office Closed</i>	
27	St. John Apostle and Evangelist	
	Mass	Noon
30	Octave of the Nativity	
	Morning Prayer	9:00am
	Mass	9:30am

PARISH CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| 1 | New Year's Day (The Most Holy Name Of Jesus) | |
| | Low Mass | 8:00am |
| | Solemn Mass | 10:30am |
| 3 | Mass | Noon |
| 6 | The Epiphany | |
| | Morning Prayer | 9:00am |
| | Mass | 9:30am |
| 7 | Societies of Mary | 11:00am |
| | <i>All are welcome to join the Societies of Mary for their monthly day of devotion, beginning in the Chapel with Rosary at 11:00am with Mass to follow. After which we will adjourn to the Parish Hall for a potluck luncheon.</i> | |
| 10 | William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1645 | |
| | Mass | Noon |
| | Finance Committee Meeting | 6:00pm |
| 13 | Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, 367 | |
| | Morning Prayer | 9:00am |
| | Mass | 9:30am |

PARISH CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January

17	Antony, Abbot in Egypt, 356	
	Mass	Noon
	Vestry Meeting	7:00pm
20	Fabian, Bishop and Martyr at Rome, 250	
	Morning Prayer	9:00am
	Mass	9:30am
22	Solemn Mass	9:30am
	Annual Meeting	11:00am
24	Mass	Noon
27	John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, 407	
	Morning Prayer	9:00am
	Mass	9:30am
29	Greater San Diego Music Coterie Concert	3:00pm
31	Mass	Noon

TREASURER'S CORNER

By John Gray III



Operating income is over budget for the month of October and expenses were also under budget.

	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Difference</u>
<i>Revenues</i>	\$31,875	\$26,004	\$5,871
<i>Expenses</i>	\$28,049	\$41,718	\$(13,670)

Key **REVENUE** deviations from plan were:

- Current month pledges were \$1,221 over budget, and we are now under budget by \$4,251 for the year
- Plate/Other Contributors is over budget year-to-date by \$8,923
- Investment income was \$3,083 over budget due to distribution timing differences

Key **EXPENSE** deviations from budget were:

- Pastoral expense was \$3,034 under budget Business expenses were \$4,295 under budget
- Facilities expenses were \$2,404 under budget
- Music Program expense was \$499 under budget
- Property Management expense was \$2,500 under budget, and we are now under budget by \$2,729 for the year

Totals through October:

	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Difference</u>
<i>Pledges</i>	\$97,834	\$102,085	\$(4,251)
<i>Total Revenues</i>	\$290,239	\$261,557	\$28,682
<i>Expenses</i>	\$421,236	\$449,099	\$(27,863)

For the first ten months of 2016, we are under budget by \$56,545.

PRESCHOOL CORNER

By John Gray III



Operating income is under budget for the month of October, but expenses were also under budget.

	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Difference</u>
<i>Revenues</i>	\$38,221	\$44,462	\$(6,241)
<i>Expenses</i>	\$36,151	\$41,560	\$(5,409)

Key *REVENUE* deviations from budget were:

- Current month tuition was \$5,120 under budget

Key *EXPENSE* deviations from budget were:

- Operating expenses for October were \$5,409 under budget. Payroll was lower than budgeted because we are using two part-time employees who are filling in for the two teachers on pregnancy leave.

Net Loss for October was \$832.

Preschool Update for November:

We currently have 66 children enrolled for November – of those 17 are part-time and 11 are toddlers.

December Activity

Preschool Annual Christmas party will be held on December 16th at 4:00pm

RECTOR'S CORNER

Community Coordinator

In the last year at All Saints' we have done a lot of good things to reach out to the community around us, and throughout that time the Vestry and I have been looking for ways to improve and add to those things. After receiving a bequest of approximately \$450,000 from Patricia Brain's estate, we agreed that now is the time to begin investing more resources into growing and developing our parish family. While we considered several possibilities and will continue to explore others, our first investment will be in a two-year pilot program that will provide a part-time, lay community coordinator position to help connect our church and preschool communities and support our outreach into Hillcrest and the wider San Diego community.

This person will serve the preschool through weekly chapel worship, Sunday School-type lessons in the classroom, being present to families physically at the school, and by regular communications and materials sent home with the kids. They will serve the church by supporting our Sunday AM Christian formation and by organizing joint church-preschool projects and events. Some of these events will also support our community outreach by serving or developing relationships with other local organizations.

We chose to begin here primarily because the preschool represents a community to which we are already connected and one that's been responsive to recent invitations. Though it's true that the school has not historically provided a path to parish membership, I believe that there are several significant factors that make this approach different.

First of all, the preschool community itself is different. While the day school opened in 1947, we've only had a stand-alone preschool since 2006 and the toddler component is less than 2 years old. Since having children is a milestone that often leads people to go back to church or to consider it for the first time, it's significant that parents of toddlers and preschoolers are generally going to be closer to that event, and therefore less likely to be deeply rooted in another faith community.

Also, just in my time at All Saints', the preschool community has grown larger and warmer, and is more engaged than when I arrived, showing up for events and projects

RECTOR'S CORNER

Community Coordinator (continued)

when they've been invited. This dynamic is especially important because another big difference will be how we are trying to develop the church-school relationship. The community coordinator's primary purpose is to bring the communities physically together through regularly-scheduled events and joint projects. Even if the families don't become members of the church, their engagement supports our outreach to other people by allowing us to be more active in the community than we could be as a church alone.

Another significant difference will be the person making the primary connection. First of all, their duties will make them more present to the preschool community than anyone recently, which is extremely important because none of the current teachers or staff provide a natural link to the church. People are always more likely to join a church if a friend has brought them, and so it makes a big difference for preschool families to have someone who's "one of them" at the church.

This is also part of why having this as a lay position is an important difference. Even though I have a lot in common with many of the families, I can't be "one of them" because I'm a priest *and* because my primary concern is clearly the church. Also, as the rector, I simply can't be at the preschool enough to be an authentic part of that community.

Finally, the last difference, and certainly the least, is me. While just having a young rector as the sole, primary contact for the preschool won't be effective by itself, and priests of any age can make families welcome, having an easy connection with parish leadership is always a plus.

While there is no magic formula or silver bullet for growing our parish membership, the Vestry and I are excited to take this first step, and to continue exploring other opportunities. Please support us in prayer as we begin the process of searching for qualified candidates and adding a new dynamic to our parish family.

RECTOR'S CORNER

Single Sunday AM Mass

At our parish brunch on All Saints' Sunday I shared with you that in response to requests from various members of the congregation, the Vestry and I have been considering the possibility of changing our Sunday morning schedule. The proposal is that rather than offering a said Mass at 8:00 and a solemn Mass at 10:30, we have a single Mass with music in some form at 9:00 or 9:30.

This is something that has been suggested to the Vestry by different people several times over the course of the last two years, but was always dismissed as being more harmful than beneficial. The two Masses each have a distinct character, and so it was believed that most people wouldn't want to give up their preference. However, because of the growing number of requests to consider this, the Vestry and I agreed that it was something we needed to explore as a parish.

Why is this worth considering?

One reason we've been asked to consider this is to answer some challenges we're currently facing. As a smaller congregation, our volunteer resources are limited, and so consolidating them at one Mass would ease the load on those already serving and might make it easier to attract new volunteers. Also, with our attendance split between two Masses, the church is usually only about a quarter full at 10:30 and even less at 8:00. The emptier any church is, the less comfortable and inviting it feels, which negates the warmth and hospitality that is probably our greatest asset in welcoming visitors, both during Mass and after.

When our whole community is together the difference has been obvious, which is the other reason people have given for wanting to explore a single Sunday morning Mass. There is a vibrant energy that's been present for special occasions, like our Annual Meeting this past January, and even at somber ones, like many of the requiems we've had, and this is true both in our worship and fellowship after. I believe this comes not just from having higher attendance, but also from the joy of a parish family that truly delights in being together, which is obvious and attractive to visitors.

RECTOR'S CORNER

Single Sunday AM Mass (continued)

As the Vestry and I have talked about this, we've also begun to see some other potential benefits from maximizing our resources. One is that this would make the work of a community coordinator (see p. 9) and other efforts at parish development more effective. Anyone coming to All Saints' on a Sunday would consistently experience all that we have to offer in worship and fellowship. For example, imagine a visiting family seeing a few kids at an 8:00 or 10:30 Mass, versus a Mass where there are 1 or 2 serving, 2 or 3 more in the pews, and then another 6-7 that come in at the Peace and maybe even sit together for the Eucharist. It's actually not unusual for us to have around that many kids and teenagers on a Sunday, but it's not as obvious when they're not all in one place.

Having a single Mass would also maximize our resources by creating an extra space on Sunday mornings, which would help address another challenge we have. It's a great blessing to have parishioners coming from all over San Diego County, but that also makes it very difficult to come together outside of Sunday mornings for things like small groups, formation and membership classes, sacramental preparation, etc. These are things that are vital to us growing in the faith, but don't exist here because there isn't a space in the week available to enough people. With the current schedule, even the things we do on Sundays aren't equally accessible to everyone.

Like many of you, I personally hadn't been interested in this proposal at the start, but this potential to make a fuller offering of our Anglo-Catholic faith has completely changed my mind and led me to believe that we need to make every effort to see if this move is feasible for All Saints'. This is an opportunity to make things like confession, anointing of the sick, Eucharistic adoration, corporate rosary, small prayer groups, etc. available at a time when people are already coming to the church and without adding clergy. I don't know of any other parish in the diocese that's doing something like that.

Moving Forward

I want to emphasize that at this point no decision has been made, because while this is something that the Vestry and I have talked about already, we are at the very beginning of

RECTOR'S CORNER

Single Sunday AM Mass (continued)

our conversation as a parish. Between now and the end of the year, please continue that conversation with the Vestry and me; whether in person or over the phone, or through emails or notes in the Pulse of the Parish box in the parish hall. More than a simple declaration of whether you're for or against it, we're looking for the specific challenges you personally would have if All Saints' moved to one Sunday Mass. The Vestry and I want to do everything we can to meet those challenges, but we have to know what they are.

Since we're already scheduled to have a single Mass for our Annual Meeting (Sunday, January 22nd), we'd like to use that Sunday as a trial run. Then we'll ask for your feedback again with an eye toward a longer trial (5-7 weeks) later in the year, likely during the summer. That will give us a chance to really fine-tune things so that we can all get a good, realistic experience of what this could look like rather than forming our opinions on possibilities or clunky early attempts.

While moving to one Mass would represent a sacrifice for everyone, I think that at this point in the life of our church, there's much more to be gained by us who are already here and by those we hope will join us. Therefore, please take this proposal to prayer and try to consider it with an open heart and mind over the course of our parish conversations.

PARISH LIFE

Christmas Poinsettias



We are offering an opportunity for parishioners to dedicate a Christmas poinsettia in memory of a loved one. These flowers will be used to decorate the High Altar and Sanctuary for Christmas. Orders must be completed by Wednesday, December 16th to ensure that all names will be in the Christmas bulletins.

We ask for a \$25 donation. Forms will be on the front and back tables on Sunday, November 26th.

Christmas Eve/Day and New Year's Day Mass Schedule

- Saturday, December 24—Christmas Eve
 - Vigil Mass at 4:00pm
 - Carols at 10:30pm
 - Solemn Mass at 11:00pm
 - Christmas Eve Cookie Party at 12:00am
- Sunday, December 25—Christmas Day
 - Sung Mass with Hymns at 10:00am
- Sunday, January 1—New Year's Day
 - Low Mass at 8:00am
 - Solemn Mass at 10:30am

PARISH LIFE

Restoration of All Saints' Sign

How it came about by Chuck Peterson, DESIGNS

While driving by one day, I noticed the emblem was missing from the All Saints' Church monument sign. I have created several cast bronze plaques in the past, so I stopped in the Church office and introduced myself. Louise Lawson, Teri Tremper and Father McQueen showed interest, so I gave them pricing on a couple of different options.

Since there was no record of how the original plaque looked, I needed to re-create a new design file based on the old rather rough hand drawn seal. I searched the web, and with Louise and Father McQueen's help, found the apostles' symbols, redrew them in a style that could work well on a new cast bronze plaque. After a couple of revisions and final approval of the design, I sent the working file to the foundry I work with. They created the finished product. It is a 14" diameter, 5/16" thick solid bronze plaque that weighs about 18 lbs.

The plaque was installed using four stainless steel studs screwed into the monument and then coated the back with Lexel, the strongest adhesive I know of. The plated surface of the bronze letters on the wall was too oxidized to polish out, so I sanded and repainted them with a very durable sign painter's gold metallic enamel.

Chuck Peterson's background: After taking design classes and apprenticing at a sign company, I started painting signs in San Diego in 1983. My work has since evolved into several other areas of commercial art. I have always had a passion for my work and am grateful for my many great customers over the years.

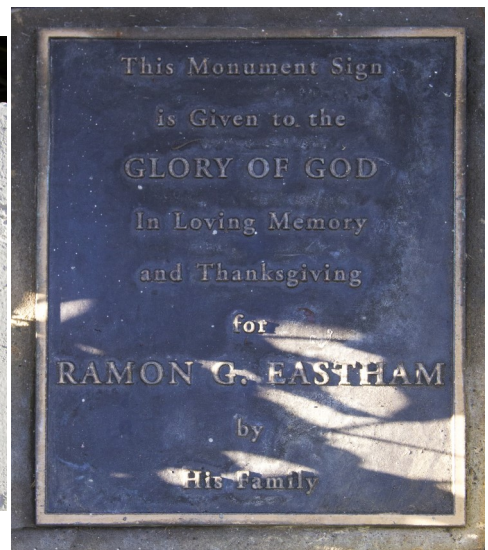
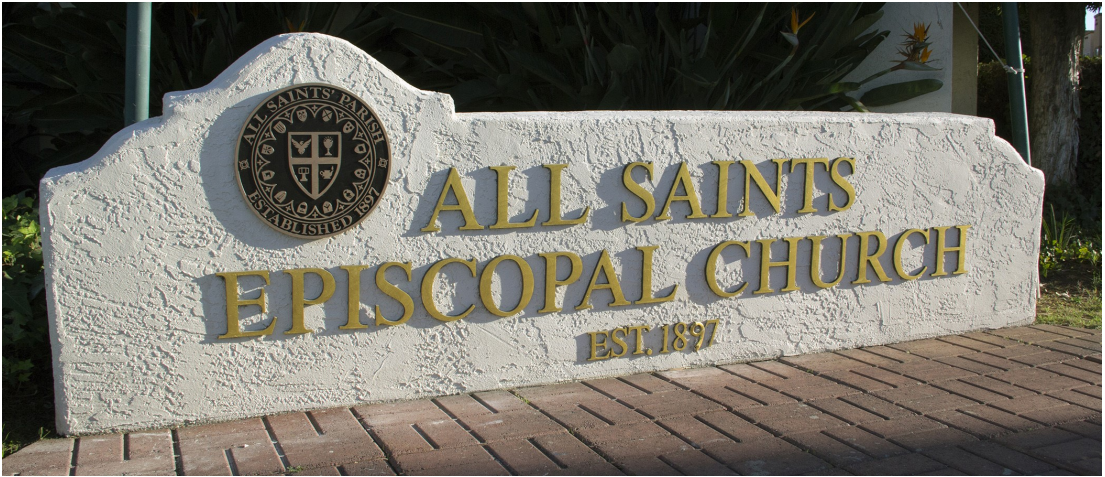
The design details of All Saints' Seal

In the coming issues of our All Saints' bi-monthly newsletter we will define the 12 apostles' symbols that encircle the seal and describe the 4 symbols on the shield.

Photos on page 16 taken by John Gray III.

PARISH LIFE

Restoration of All Saints' Sign (continued)



Monument Sign inscription: This Monument Sign is given to the GLORY OF GOD in loving memory and thanksgiving for Ramon G. Eastham by his family. If any parishioner has information on Ramon G. Eastham and his family, please email Louise Lawson at administrator@allsaintschurch.org

CONCERTS AT ALL SAINTS'

Christmas Bells! *for Cellos and Choir*
Sunday, December 18, 5pm

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Please join cellist Sophie Webber and members of the All Saints Church Choir (plus a sextet of Sophie's private cello students) for an uplifting evening of Christmas-inspired music for cellos and voices! From Bach's jubilant and bell-like Suite for Solo Cello No.6 to Carol of the Bells and Silent Night. With candles, mulled wine and other seasonal refreshments, this will be an evening to remember and to lift your spirits!

Donation: \$10 general admission; \$5 for seniors/students - 50% of proceeds will support St. Luke's Episcopal Church for their building of a refugee job training site.

On display that evening in the Parish Hall will be All Saints' inspired artwork by Todd Muffatti. The artwork includes stained glass themed cards and ornaments as well as miniature assemblages of our church. All proceeds will go to All Saints'. Here's an opportunity to find that special Christmas gift



CONCERTS AT ALL SAINTS'

Greater San Diego Music Coterie

Sunday, January 29, 2017, 3pm



On Sunday, January 29, 2017 the Greater San Diego Orchestra and Chorus, under the direction of Angela Yeung, will return to All Saints' to share the experiences from their successful Fifth Anniversary Tour.

The program will open with Li Huanzhi's Spring Festival Suite (in celebration of the Chinese New Year.) A native of Hong Kong, Chinese composer Li Huanzhi earned his standing as one of the world's most successful composers by dint of his music's popularity throughout China. His style infuses ancient and honored traditions of Chinese musical performance with the techniques of modern composition, harmonic theory and orchestration.

The chorus and soloists will then join the orchestra to present songs from Aaron Copeland's wonderful *Old American Songs* such as "I Bought Me a Cat", and "Ching-A Ring Chaw". The program concludes with choruses, soprano and baritone solos from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.

An afternoon of music to lift your spirits.

To learn more about the Coterie visit their web site <http://gsdmusicoterie.org>

Donation: \$10 general admission; \$5 for seniors and/students. Proceeds will support the work of the Music Coterie and the outreach programs of All Saints' Episcopal Church.

COMMEMORATION

John of the Cross

d. 1591



Painting by Francisco de Zurbarian,
1656

Juan de Ypres y Alvarez was born in 1542. His father died soon after, and Juan was brought up in an orphanage. (His father was probably Jewish. It is remarkable how many of the most memorable Spanish Christians have been of Jewish background.) At seventeen, he enrolled as a student in a Jesuit college, and at twenty-one, he joined the Carmelite Friars. He was ordained in 1567, and almost immediately met Teresa of Avila, a Carmelite Nun who was undertaking to return the Order to its original strict rule, which had been gradually relaxed to the detriment, as she believed, of the spiritual lives of the members of the Order. Those who followed the strict rule as promulgated by Teresa went barefoot or wore sandals instead of shoes, and so became known as Discalced (unshod) Carmelites, or Carmelites of the Strict Observance. John undertook to adopt the stricter rule and encourage others to do so.

Not all members of the order welcomed the change. In 1577 a group of Calced Carmelites, or Carmelites of the Ancient Observance, kidnapped John and demanded that he renounce the reform. When he refused, he was imprisoned in complete darkness and solitude in a Calced monastery in Toledo for about nine months. He then escaped

COMMEMORATION

John of the Cross (continued)

and fled to a Calced monastery. While imprisoned at Toledo, he had begun to compose some poems, and now he wrote them down, with commentaries on their spiritual significance.

He was given various positions of leadership among the reformed friars, but then dissension broke out among the reformers between "moderates" and "extremists." John supported the moderate party, and when the extremists gained control, they denounced him as a traitor to the reform. He was sent to a remote friary, and fell ill, and finally died at Ubeda during the night preceding 14 December 1591.

His works have been translated into English by David Lewis (1906), and by E. Allison Peers (1953). His poems have been translated by Roy Campbell and are available from Penguin Press The following extract is quoted from the poetic translation by Peers.

from *The Living Flame of Love*:

O Living flame of love
That, burning, dost assail
My inmost soul with tenderness untold,
Since thou dost freely move,
Deign to consume the veil
Which sunders this sweet converse that we hold ...

And O, ye lamps of fire,
In whose resplendent light
The deepest caverns where the senses meet,
Erst steeped in darkness dire,
Blaze with new glories bright
And to the loved one give both light and heat!

From James Kiefer's BIO

COMMEMORATION

Agnes, Martyr at Rome

d. 304



Agnes is a Christian martyr who died at Rome around 304 in the persecution of Diocletian: the last and fiercest of the persecutions of Christianity by the Roman emperors. The anniversary of her martyrdom is observed on 21 January. Her name means "pure" in Greek and "lamb" in Latin. She is said to have been only about twelve or thirteen when she died, and the remains preserved in St Agnes' Church in Rome are in agreement with this. It is said that her execution shocked many Romans and helped bring an end to the persecutions. Some said, "It is contrary to Roman law to put a virgin to death. Our leaders say that it is necessary to kill Christians in order to preserve the old Roman ways: but they are themselves scorning those ways in the process."

Others said, "Do young girls constitute such a threat to Rome that it is necessary to kill them?"

Others said, "If this religion can enable a twelve-year-old girl to meet death without fear, it is worth checking out."

COMMEMORATION

Agnes, Martyr at Rome (continued)

There is a narrative poem by Keats, called "The Eve of Saint Agnes." It is a romantic poem with a mediaeval setting, about an elopement the night before St Agnes' Day. The only tie-in with Agnes is that (presumably because she died as a young virgin), Agnes is regarded as the patron of young unmarried girls, and there is a folk-belief that a girl who goes to bed supperless on the eve of St Agnes's Day will dream that night about her husband-to-be.

From James Kiefer's BIO

ADVENT DEVOTION

Matthew 11:2-11 “Salvation—Not for Sale” by The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church

What do you see? In mysteries, whether on the pages of books or on the screen, the detective is not necessarily more suave, more sophisticated, more impressive than the other people in the room. Far from it, sometimes. But the detective—at least, the successful detective—is the one who notices what others miss, who observes what others gloss over. To those who do not truly see, a half-empty glass or a torn piece of paper is simply that, but to the observant one, it can be an important clue that unlocks the puzzle.

When John the Baptist sends messengers to inquire whether Jesus might be the Messiah, Jesus tells them to go back to John and report what they have seen: remarkable healings, changed lives, unimagined possibilities. As the messengers depart, Jesus goes on to ask those around him what they expected to see when they first encountered John in the desert. Perhaps they thought they would see someone dressed to impress, someone living the easy life. But what did they see? A true prophet, someone who challenged all their expectations.

Elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel, we find the story of Jesus looking in vain for figs on a barren fig tree, cursing it when he found none. His disciples were surprised since they themselves could see that the tree would not bear any fruit. Why was he so upset? What did he expect? That is the question, isn’t it? The disciples saw what they expected to see. Jesus always sees beyond the expected. Jesus sees more.

As twenty-first century followers of Christ, it is all too easy to take up with those earliest followers and only see the expected. If so, we will miss so much. Sure, we can pray and go to church and move forward knowing that God loves us...and all this is good. All this is of God. But God wants more for us. God wants us to do more than just settle in our faith. If we just settle in our spiritual rocking chairs, we will miss out on all the miracles, we will miss out on all the divine opportunities, we will miss out on all the unexpected possibilities that God wants us to experience. If we dare to open our hearts to God’s grace, if we dare to open the eyes of our spirits, then we will discover what the beloved old hymn says, “I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.”

ADVENT DEVOTION

Matthew 11:2-11 “Salvation—Not for Sale” (continued)

As Christ’s followers today, as members of the Jesus Movement, we need to throw off the blinders that prevent us from experiencing the abundant life and remarkable ministry to which God calls each one of us. Let us follow not simply in the footsteps of those early disciples, but let us follow in the footsteps of Jesus himself who offered salvation freely. There are still people to be touched, lives to be changed. But will we dare to open our eyes and see what God may be trying to show us?

Will we dare to open our eyes and be evangelists, messengers of hope to those around us who may not even realize they desperately need that hope? When the earliest disciples were afraid to accept Saul of Tarsus into their community—because all they could see was an angry, dangerous person—it took Barnabas to look at Saul/Paul through a different lens and to see...not just what was...but what could be.

Will we dare to open our eyes and be reconcilers, building bridges where chasms of hurt and resentment exist between people? When thirteenth-century crusaders looked at those who were different from them and saw only enemies, it took Francis of Assisi to view the situation in a different way, crossing through battle lines with courage and humility, and opening up crucial lines of communication with the Sultan himself.

Will we dare to open our eyes and be true stewards of God’s creation? When countless people...both those who call themselves Christians and those who don’t...continue to take this planet for granted, it takes those with eyes to see to look around, step forward, and do what is needed to preserve “this fragile earth, our island home.”

As those who would indeed follow Christ, let us open our eyes to see what we have all too often missed. Let us, by the power of the Spirit, become the evangelists, reconcilers, and stewards of creation, that God calls us to be, because salvation is not for sale. ♦



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