



The Line

Diocese of the West



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Hello Brothers and Sisters in Christ

I want to wish all of you a very Happy Thanksgiving. I pray you all have much to be thankful for this year, and that you get to spend the day with your loved ones.

Remember both in prayer and deed those who have no home to go to, and those who are in the military, away from their loved ones and unable to spend the holidays with them. We as Christians in this country have so much to be thankful for. Pray for those who don't share our religious freedom and are being persecuted for their beliefs.



The Bishop's Corner

November has two festivals whose calendar juxtaposition is coincidental, but they are complimentary in a significant way. November begins with All Saints Day, a major feast of the Church, and for good reason. Yet because our society divides life into sacred and secular, and on the calendar has assigned the sacred to Sunday, it has diminished importance among us. God apparently is only present on Sundays (except for personal emergencies) and even then, our society is encroaching at a rapid rate on that. Typically, the All Saints festive celebration is limited to a handful of people on a weekday evening or ignored entirely, with perhaps an honorable mention the following Sunday.

Without realizing it, Americans celebrate All Saints with gusto and great attention, of course. Halloween comes from "hallowed even," the eve of Allhallows, an archaic term for All Saints Day. The partial emphasis of the day on John's glorious vision of heaven, with all its creatures and saints, has devolved into an event of ghosts and goblins and scary things. One can retrace the path by which this happened, but reconnecting the dots has yet to be tried.

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In our not distant past, Protestants ignored or denounced any commemoration of saints, and often religious festivals in general, leaving only the obligation of the Sabbath. At the same time, Roman Catholics were required to attend mass for the occasion, but failed to celebrate the message. The holiday thus slipped away from its Christian moorings to be popular and beloved, but with the Christian heart removed from it, perhaps a very appropriate Halloween scary image in itself. As Christmas approaches, the same struggle is evident. Those who don't know history (=the average American?) are unaware that Christmas was not widely observed in the United States. Calvinists and Baptists had no interest in the Church Year, only in the Sabbath. Christmas was just another workday, except for small pockets of Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and a few Lutherans, often forced to celebrate Christmas around a work schedule, as we must with All Saints. I can personally remember many Lutheran and Protestant churches fifty years ago which had no Christmas Eve or Day worship. It should not surprise us that when the Church is no longer the anchor of time, the festivals drift away, and getting them back is very hard.

Other cultures have evolved in different directions. The Norwegians remember the saints now in glory, and sing beautiful hymns about the heavenly vision. Mexicans observe "El Dia de los Muertos," the day of the dead. But instead of being a day of scary ghosts and zombies, it is a family day, often celebrated at the cemetery, when the connection with those we love now departed is continued and passed on to a new generation, a picnic agape.

The vision of the great host before the heavenly Throne, all vested in the albs which cover their sinful pasts in the cleansing blood of Jesus, from every ethnicity and language, all shouting and singing their praise in gratitude for their salvation, makes this a landmark Day every year, as you and I grow closer to joining their number. But it is only half the story. The collect for the Day tells it, "O Almighty God, who has knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that we may come to those unspeakable joys which thou hast prepared for those who unfeignedly love thee.." And in the lessons for All Saints Day, what follows the account of the great host at the Throne is not eschatology, but the Beatitudes, Jesus' outline of ethics of how to live the Christian life. It is for right now, for living life this very day. As the Collect summarizes, we are all knit together in the Body which we receive in the All Saints Mass, and into which we are incorporated, not just visiting for the occasion, but knit together. Further, the two lessons knit together present and future, earth and heaven, the joining of our feeble voices with the great host and the angels in singing the triumph song, "Holy, holy, holy..." Then to remember as we live during the sacred ordinary days of our lives, Jesus' guide for "virtuous and godly living," which connects to the "unspeakable joys." No wonder this event is called "Eucharist."

By chance, this connects to the other great festival of the month, Thanksgiving (Eucharist means thanksgiving, or literally "good grace"). While it does not have roots in the Church Year,

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but rather in American history (although harvest festivals are common elsewhere as well), it makes a Christian point. When you comprehend what God has done, thanks is the best response. We cannot repay him, we cannot earn what he has done for us. But we can give thanks and praise. How better to do so than in the Eucharist. Thanksgiving, thus, is the perfect way to conclude our observance of All Saints, and to finish the Church Year as well, which ends on November 30. Some years are easier than others. But with an ethic which tells us that being persecuted is cause for “exceeding joy,” and in a Faith which tells us of the “unspeakable joys” which await, and indeed can be partially glimpsed even now, thanksgiving is always the appropriate way to wrap up the year. We have indeed been given “good grace.”

And then to begin the new year, in which we first prepare our heart for the celebration of the first coming, and the reality of the second, in the fast of Advent.

Diocesan Details

Upon my retirement next summer, we expect to transition to being a Convocation instead of a Diocese. The bishops of the Reformed Episcopal Church, of which we are a member diocese, voted to recommend to the ACNA that we no longer continue as a diocese. Since the ACNA is extremely unlikely to override the wishes of the REC concerning one of its own dioceses, our Standing Committee has moved to a “Plan B,” to be a convocation within another diocese. This allows us to continue our own community and tradition without the need for diocesan

structure. We are exploring which diocese will be the best option for us, as we seek to do God’s will along our pilgrim path. Please keep in mind:

1. Your input is important in the discussion. You are welcome to contact any member of the Standing Committee or myself regarding any concerns, questions, thoughts or opinions you have on this.

2. The Diocese will continue to function as usual, and events will take place as always. Even after we are a Convocation, we will continue to function as a community with most of the usual activities. This will all happen in an orderly manner, with transparency and consultation. Please continue to participate as usual in the life of the Diocese.

3. Those who do not wish to remain part of the community will have opportunity in plenty of time to relocate jurisdictionally, and we will assist in that in any way we can.

4. There is nothing in this transition that should distract us from our purpose, individually and collectively, to be servants and witnesses of our Lord.

Your bishop,

+Win



Parish News

Being One Flesh.

Submitted by Father Michael Penfield

“So they are no longer two, but one flesh.” [St. Mark 10:8b]

My mother used to say that every old maid was an expert on children and every bachelor an expert on marriage. That saying has haunted me ever since. As a result, whenever I counsel a couple before I marry them, I always have a last session that I entitle “Advise on Marriage from a 58 year old Bachelor.” I warn them in advance that my observations are just that, and they may take them with a grain of salt. But marriage advice is not the same thing as the theology behind Holy Matrimony.

Although there is clearly a pragmatic side to matrimony, that pragmatic side, unfortunately, often eclipses the spiritual side. However, the spiritual side is just as real and just as important as the pragmatic. In fact, in a very real sense, it is MORE important. For without a proper understanding of Holy Matrimony and how it changes the nature of our relationship with our spouse, there can be no real understanding as to how we are to handle the pragmatic.

Now before I go on, I would like to make one thing clear: there is a difference between being married and being joined in Holy Matrimony. Marriage is a legal term. It defines a couple’s rights, privileges, and duties under the law. Therefore, “marriage” is in the purview of the government and may be defined as it sees fit. On the other hand, Holy Matrimony is a sacrament instituted by God, and therefore cannot be changed without an act OF God. We

will be speaking almost exclusively about the sacrament of Holy Matrimony and NOT civil marriage throughout this sermon.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus is asked a very pointed question regarding the right to divorce, which is contained in the Old Testament law. Jesus’ response is profound on two levels:

Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

The first thing that this passage reveals is that Jesus is God Incarnate. No human would know why Moses put the right of divorce into the Law, and more importantly, no mere man would know that God never intended this right. If what Jesus is saying in this passage is true, then he is privy to the knowledge and thoughts of God. And therefore, this passage reveals that Jesus is both Man and God. He is the Incarnate Word, and what He says is what God wants all of us to hear.

The second thing this passage reveals, is how Holy Matrimony is viewed in heaven. When two people enter Holy Matrimony they become “one flesh.” This is a profound mystery, one that

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many may not understand or believe, but it is an absolute truth.

As some of you may know, I am half Italian – Sicilian to be precise. And there used to be a wonderful, old custom in Sicily that my great aunt and uncle observed until their deaths. In Sicily it was the custom that once a couple were married, they would no longer have separate plates or glasses at the dinner table. Rather, they would both eat from the same plate and drink from the same glass. As a result, they would have a “marriage plate”, which was like a rather small platter. But the reason they did this is because they took God’s statement to be literally true. They are now one flesh, eating from one plate and drinking from one cup.

To fully understand this great mystery wherein two become one flesh, we must go back to the Book of Genesis – not to the passage that we read in our first lesson, but to an earlier passage.

In Genesis, Chapter 1, verse 27, we have this relatively short but powerful statement:

“So God made man; in the image of God He made him: male and female He made them.”

Many people pass over this passage too quickly, but contained in this passage is the very nature of Holy Matrimony.

The first thing we must note is the obvious – that God made man. But what comes next is fascinating. God made man in His image; He made THEM male and female. In other words, God made mankind in His image, but He

SPLIT His image, giving part to the male and the other part to the female – complimentary parts that come together to form one true image. This means that it was God’s intention from the very beginning to present a proper image of Himself in this world through the union between one man and one woman. And doesn’t this make sense given what we know about the nature of God.

Our God is a Triune God. He is three Persons in one Godhead. This is revealed in the previous verse of Genesis where God announced: *“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.”* [Genesis 1:26] He speaks of “Us” revealing three Persons, yet speaks of only one “image” and not three, revealing one Godhead. So, for God to have created two parts coming together and becoming one whole image makes perfect sense.

Likewise, God is love. And what brings a man and a woman together? Ideally, it is love. If it weren’t for the fact that we are in a fallen world, we would see clearly that God intended the married couple to present a true image of Himself through love. But because we live in a fallen world, this image is corrupted. In the past marriages were arranged. Love may not have even entered the picture. In the present, passions rather than love seem to determine some marriages. And often in this world marriages are total disasters.

But to us gathered here, there is an important point that we should take to heart. In the union of one man and one woman there still exists an image of God. Granted this image is imperfect,

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being marred by the Fall, but it is still an image of God worth preserving.

Because we know that in Holy Matrimony the couple become one flesh, and also that in Holy Matrimony we see the divine, how a Christian husband and wife should treat each other becomes different than what the world tells us is proper. The husband and wife are one flesh. That means they are NOT enemies. They are allies. After all, flesh only does battle with itself if it is ill. All other times, it helps itself and promotes its own health, strength, and vigor. Likewise, couples should work together as a unit, as a whole, and not as independent parts. And here is where being a Christian will come in direct conflict with our present society.

Americans celebrate the rugged individual. We emphasize going it alone. And we love the underdog. As a result, becoming one flesh means one of two things to many Americans – either it means loss of identity or a loss of power. But that is NOT what becoming one flesh really entails.

If we objectively read what St. Paul wrote about marriage, we would see an image of matrimony based on mutual respect, admiration, and self-sacrifice. We see two as mutual helpmates and not competitors. And we see that, as two different yet complimentary images of God come together, they bring two perspectives into their relationship. Sometimes it is the husband who perceives the situation properly; sometimes it is the wife. Therefore, neither spouse should disappear, but rather, should and must voice what they see. However, every statement of

truth should be said in love. Only when both spouses are respected and both work together trying to be harmonious, do we see a healthy marriage.

God blessed Holy Matrimony since the creation of mankind. And it has always been intended by God to be a means of presenting a true image of Himself to this world. Holy Matrimony presents this image through the mystical union between a man and a woman as they become one flesh. So, let us celebrate this great sacramental mystery by honoring those who enter this union. Let us support and nurture them both during the easy times and the hard. And let us bless them by honoring them in our churches, in our communities, and in our homes. And if we do this, maybe we can glimpse the divine in their relationship – as well as our own. *Amen.*



Marriage is a gift from God,
and never was a human invention

Parish News (continued)

Greetings Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today, more than ever, we live in a world full of paradoxes. With the advent of email and cellular phones we have more ways than ever to “be connected,” yet many of us often feel lonely and isolated from the outside world. We have all kinds of technology to enhance and prolong life, but often miss the joy that can be found in everyday life. As humans, many of us put up a facade for the sake of appearances. Facades that give the impression that we are strong and secure, yet many things in our lives are transitory and unstable. Even if some of us have good lives and feel fulfilled and are “on the go,” we may lack any sense of real or enduring purpose and often question our own worth. Far too often, we find that all the church can offer us in the midst of all these paradoxes is a list of things that we should or should not do. Church does not help us navigate through our world, but increases our guilt and burden. In the process, many of us realize that this is not the life that Jesus has planned for us. We know that Jesus has so much more in store for us. Yet sadly, many will not respond to Jesus’ call for us to have a more meaningful and abundant life. It is so easy to be overwhelmed and inundated by the fullness of our lives and the distractions of the world, that we settle for lives that are less than what Jesus desires for us. Often we dream too small; we settle our desires and wants on things of lesser value. We serve lesser “gods,” and miss out on a genuine and fulfilling life. Jesus gives us a means of stepping out of a world bound by confusion and empty promises. In Jesus we are not required to conform to some mold of what we think we should be, but rather step into

our true identity, which is whom God intended us to be. We can become who God intended us to be, a brotherhood of purpose driven Christians, focused on making the world a better and safer place for all of God’s children.

Peace in Christ,
Fr. Yossi Sarid

Prayer Requests

Pray for the families of the victims of the terrorist attacks in Paris. Pray for protection for all against these horrific acts. Pray for peace.

Pray for God to lead us in the Diocese of the West as we move forward. May our choices always be His will.

Pray for those confined to hospitals and nursing homes. And to those who provide care for them.

Pray for Elaine Nelson, a resident of a nursing home in Napa, CA, who was recently transported to a local hospital.

Pray for the leaders of Christ’s Church, and especially our own Bishop Mott.



Advent

Old-fashioned, Spiritual Christmas?

John R. Brokhoff, Preaching the Parables—Cycle C. p. 28.

“What has happened to the old-fashioned, spiritual Christmas? The cause is our disregard of Advent. The church set aside this four-week pre-Christmas season as a time of spiritual preparation for Christ’s coming. It is a time of quiet anticipation. If Christ is going to come again into our hearts, there must be repentance. Without repentance, our hearts will be so full of worldly things that there will be ‘no room in the inn’ for Christ to be born again. We have the joy not of celebration. Which is the joy of Christmas, but the joy of anticipation.”

An Advent Examination

Edward Hays, A Pilgrim’s Almanac, p. 196

“Advent is the perfect time to clear and prepare the Way. Advent is a winter training camp for those who desire peace. By reflection and prayer, by reading and meditation, we can make our hearts a place where a blessing of peace would desire to abide, and where the birth of the Prince of Peace might take place.”

“Daily we can make an Advent examination. Are there any feelings of discrimination toward race, sex, or religion? Is there a lingering resentment, an unforgiven injury living in our hearts? Do we look down upon others of lesser social standing or educational achievement? Are we generous with the gifts that have been given to us, seeing ourselves as their stewards and not their owners? Are we reverent of others, their ideas and needs, and of creation? These and other questions become Advent lights by which we may search the deep, dark corners of our hearts.”

Hint of Humor



And a little animal Humor

