



The Line

Convocation of the West



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True Christian Christmas

Christmas isn't showy gifts
 Or glittering decoration;
 It's honoring our Savior, Jesus Christ
 In humble adoration.

It's serving those less fortunate,
 Meeting their needs before our own;
 It's making sure at Christmas time
 That no one is alone.

It's taking what we would have spent
 On things that no one needs,
 And using it to help someone
 With service and good deeds.

Our Savior showed us how to live
 With charity, faith and service.
 It makes the holidays a joy,
 More peaceful, and less nervous.

So let's remember Christmas is
 About our Savior's birth;
 That's the way to happiness,
 The way to peace on earth.

By Joanna Fuchs



The Vicar's Venue

As I sit here on Thanksgiving morning preparing to go to St. Luke's annual service, I am struck by two things. The first is awe. How terribly blessed are we!

The wild fires in California; the shootings in Chicago, Pittsburg and Thousand Oaks; our fine men and women serving and dying for us in the armed service of our country; and the police officers, fire fighters, and pilots who protect us every day. Each and every one of these people has experienced terrible tragedies this year from which most of us have been blessedly shielded. It puts me in awe. Why them? Why not me? If ever I am placed in a similar situation, I pray to God that I can be as composed and as full of grace as the ones who have been interviewed on television. And I thank God for the blessings and the protections of this year, both known and unknown.

The second is shame. I have been very remiss in writing this newsletter and sending it out. I have been quite busy, but that is no excuse. We all are busy. We need this communication. We



Vicar's Venue (continued)

need to keep in touch. And as we approach the new year for the church (the first Sunday in Advent), I resolve to do better.

So, with this in mind, I feel called to put aside my original article to send you an Advent message:

“Then were there brought unto Him little children, that he should put His hands on them, and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, ‘Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ And He laid His hands on them, and departed thence.” [Matthew 19:13-15]

When I was 3 ½ years old, my family moved to Washington, D.C. That very first Christmas we went to Midnight Mass. At this time, and being Roman Catholic, the Mass was in Latin. The music was beautiful, singing “Adeste Fideles,” and the lights were bright. It was also very crowded. But being a little tike of 4, and being that it was so late, I stretched out on the cold, hard pew and fell asleep. When Mass was over, I was awakened and we went back to our apartment. My mom fixed us all hot chocolate with one huge marshmallow, and we were sent to bed. Never had I ever felt so loved and so enveloped in God’s embrace. The following year our church banned all children under the age of 14 from attending Midnight Mass. This was the first of several disappointments that help me move in High School from a believer to an atheist.

But this seems to be a common occurrence in our churches. We tend to exclude our children from certain things because being children, they do things which we may think is inappropriate.

Sometimes they are inappropriate, and we need to correct them. But sometimes it really isn’t. We just have an expectation or a tradition that tells us that they shouldn’t be doing something, or that they should be doing something else.

With me, it was others thinking that a child asleep in the pews is too young to really be a part of the worship or to appreciate what is happening. What they didn’t realize was that I WAS part of the worship. God was with me. His Holy Spirit filled the Church; His Son was there in the bread and the wine; and He, God the Father had me wrapped in His arms. I look back and think, “Did no one else feel this?” I felt loved. I felt secure. And I felt like I was home. What is inappropriate with that?

Our children need to be with us. They need to be with the Lord. They need to be part of the service. They need to feel Christ.

When I was rector of a church, the tradition was for the children to wait until their confirmation to receive Holy Communion. By then they were teenagers; early teenagers, but still teenagers. I found that as I catechized them, they were starting to be skeptical, especially about the Real Presence. I asked permission to do something the Roman Catholics did when I was a child.

We started having First Holy Communion for children around 7 years old. This helped me in two ways. First, it gave me another chance to catechize the children. And second, it gave the children a chance to experience the mystery of the Real Presence before they became jaded.





Vicar's Venue (continued)

Children have a great gift for understanding and appreciating that which teenagers and adults have lost the ability to see. Children understand and accept the mysteries in our Christian faith. They accept the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist readily. They receive it reverently. And they appreciate it heartily. It was the one change I made at this church that I never regretted.

Every church is different, but I always am troubled when I see the children leave in the middle of the service to go to Sunday school – no matter what the denomination. They should be experiencing the whole service, not just part.

Yes, I understand that this tradition does give the parents time and peace for their worship, but there is something much more important. I feel that this practice can help alienate our children from our faith. They are not present to experience the whole worship service, and this can result in them not being properly catechized in the faith. Without knowing the full service and why we do what we do, they may not fully understand our faith. Without hearing the sermons, they may not learn what the rest of the parishioners are learning. And these two things may leave our little ones vulnerable when they enter their teen years.

As a teenager, our children start being bombarded with messages that conflict with the Christian message. They start hearing and reading things that may help them question their faith. And without a proper understanding, they may start believing the doubters, not the believers. This may happen to both well-instructed and poorly instructed children. However, the advantage a

well-instructed child may have over his or her more ignorant counterpart is that when the time comes, he or she will have the proper information, and more importantly, formation to return to the faith. Without it, the child may be lost to other quasi-spiritual avenues that won't lead them home readily. I fear that this is one reason why we lose so many of our sons and daughters in their teens or when they go away to college. And I fear this is the reason that so many eschew organized religions, and choose to be called "spiritual" instead of "religious."

We need to catechize our children in the faith. We need to give them the intellectual tools to defend themselves. But we also need them to experience and understand the great mysteries of our Christian, catholic, Anglican faith. And part of their catechesis must be experiencing the great Mass, the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, and the Eucharist. Without this experience, without this understanding installed at a very young age and continued throughout their teen years, they will not fully understand the Anglican faith.

So, this is my wish and prayer for Advent. I wish and pray that all our churches will include every one, the young and the old, the small and the tall, in our services. Suffer the little children to be with us. Train them how to act, and teach them why we do what we do when we do it. And do not worry if they fall asleep in the pews during Midnight Mass or the Great Easter Vigil; just pray that the children, through the Holy Spirit and in conjunction with Christ's Real Presence, will experience the peace, love, and blessing that I felt.



Vicar's Venue (continued)

And if they do, you can rest assured that your children will experience the same blessing felt by those children so long ago when Jesus laid His hands on them.

God bless and Amen.

The Rev. Cannon Michael Penfield

Vicar-General of the ACW



Parish News

Upcoming Synod

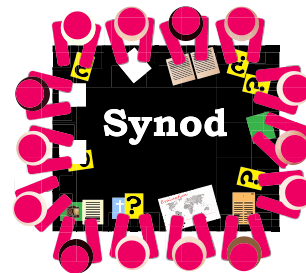
The Missionary Diocese of All Saints will be holding their 2019 Synod in Ocean City, Maryland, in March. Additionally, the Anglican Convocation of the West will be holding their Meeting of the Convocation at the same time and the same location.

The Synod is March 21 through March 23. Our meeting will be the morning of March 21. This means that those members of the Convocation who will be attending need to arrive by the evening of March 20.

However, some parishes have already indicated that they were NOT coming. For that reason,

we will be conducting the Meeting of the Convocation by telephone conference. If your church is not coming, please notify Vicar General Michael Penfield of the name of the person who will be telephone stand-by to represent your church via our telephone conference.

We hope to see you all there!



Upcoming Clericus 2019

The Anglican Convocation of the West will be holding their annual Clericus in Mesilla, New Mexico, April 23 to April 25. Registration forms can be obtained from the Convocation's web sight. Our guest speaker will be the Right Reverend Kenneth Myers. The good Bishop will be speaking on spiritual formation and prayer.

Please have the proper registration forms to our Vicar General by **March 23, 2019**. Fees can be paid either in advance or at the time of registration.

Please make checks payable to "The Diocese of the West" as our "dba" has not yet been established.

This promises to be an excellent Clericus. We hope to see you all there!



Parish News (continued)

A fiddler on the roof. Sounds crazy, no? But in our little village of Anatevka, you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof, trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking his neck. It isn't easy. You may ask, why do we stay up there if it's so dangerous? We stay because Anatevka is our home... And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word... Tradition."

The papa, from Fiddler on the Roof

Most of us can relate to the Fiddler in a metaphorical sense. The balance between what is essential and what is frivolous is precarious. Time is one of our most precious commodities and it does matter how we spend it. Resources are a close contender. There are consequences to how we spend our dollars, our energies and creativity. We all know what it is like when at the end of the day, or at the end of the week, or at the end of the month we are dry. Our resources are exhausted, used up and there is no fiddl'n left.

So, how do we keep our balance, our footing?
Tradition of course!

Tradition wards off confusion, it establishes routine, it dictates what happens when, it can even bring peace in the midst of chaos. So very, very helpful at a time when we are vulnerable to the clatter and temptations from main street and the surrounding culture. Tradition grounds us and brings us back home.

Tradition can be a tyrannical task master if we fail to filter out, at the least, some of the nonessentials. To that I suggest, let the church

set the pace. The church moves toward Christmas one week at a time, one candle at a time. The decor is simple, uncomplicated, conducive to quiet meditation. The music contemplative. The color serious. It is in the quiet that God speaks and refreshes our spirit. As the weeks progress the pace quickens, but we are prepared. Shortly before Christmas Day, the greens are hung and the lights lit. Come Christmas we feast and celebrate.

No doubt easier said than done. But not impossible. We risk missing the blessing if at the end we are out of fiddle, the music is used up, and the babe is no longer a mystery. Traditions worth their salt are not burdensome. And should they become so, there is no crime in abandoning them. They will have served their purpose and their memories will live on. Traditions have permission to change as our life experiences change. What we want most from our traditions is for them to support our faith and the message of the season, and not drain them of their beauty and expectation.

And so I leave you with one last word from the 'Papa.' Wisdom is to be found there appropriate to our Advent and Christmas seasons. "Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years. Here in Anatevka we have traditions for everything.... how to eat, how to sleep, even, how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered and always wear a little prayer shawl.... This shows our constant devotion to God. You may ask, how did this tradition start? I'll tell you - I don't know. But it's a tradition..... Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what





Parish News (continued)

God expects him to do.”

May it be said of us, “because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do..”

Fr Don Hughes,

St. John's Anglican Church



Parish News (continued)

Under Christmas Attack

You and your family are under attack..You probably won't feel the siege - it's subtle, seductive, and attractive - and that's why this attack is infinitely more dangerous.

What in the world am I talking about?

Look at the calendar. The advent season commences in just a few days. It should be a glorious time of remembering God's response to his lost and rebellious image bearers. That response wasn't to condemn, but to give the ultimate gift of grace: the gift of himself. But instead of a peaceful season of worship and celebration, Advent has devolved into a spiritual war.

A False Christmas Story

The “Christmas Story” which the surrounding culture celebrates puts us at the center, the place for God and God alone. It looks to creation for fulfilment rather than worship of the Creator. It makes physical pleasure our primary need rather than the rescuing intervention of the Redeemer. It's dominated by the comforts of the moment rather than eternal priorities.

In every way, the story you will hear over and over again during this season is dangerously wrong when it comes to who we are and what we need. It encourages us to find comfort where comfort can't be found and to place our hope in things that will never deliver.

To be clear, I have no problem with beautiful decorations, family feasting, or giving gifts. The Christmas season can be a time when families gather again, renew relationships, and express love for one another.

But I'm concerned that we're listening to a false Christmas story instead of remembering the true Advent narrative - a story that defines our beliefs about who we are, what we need, and what our lives are about.

The True Advent Narrative

Unlike that false Christmas story, the true Advent narrative is humbling and unattractive. It's a sad story about a world terribly broken by sin, populated by self-centered rebels who are willing participants in their own destruction. It's about beings created to live for God who in every way live for themselves.



Parish News (continued)

This story is about the dethroning of the Creator and the enthroning of his creation. It's about conditions so desperate that God did the unthinkable, sending his Son to be the sacrificial Lamb of redemption. And why did Jesus come? Because we were so lost, so enslaved, and so self-deceived that there was simply no other way.

Until we hear and understand the bad news, the good news won't be attractive to us. The news that Jesus came on a glorious mission of grace to live, die, and rise in our place is only worth celebrating when you understand it's our only hope.

Fight For Your Heart

The war for Advent isn't about whether we should sing silly seasonal tunes versus gospel carols, or have worship times versus big family feasts. You can do both. Rather, this war is about what story of identity, need, meaning, and purpose we will believe and give our hearts to pursue.

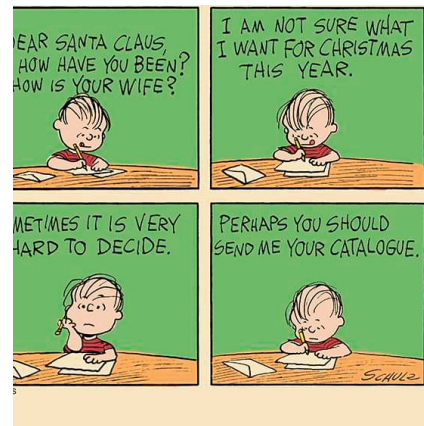
Life really is a battle of stories, and the battle rages most fiercely when the true story is meant to be told most loudly.

So enjoy the gifts, the decorations, and the delicacies, but start defending your heart and your family by telling the true Advent narrative.

Before you begin to get distracted by all the traditions of holiday fun, take up the battle for your soul.

Paul David Tripp

Hint of Humor



Parting Words

With all the added responsibilities and activities of the season we can lose focus on the season's true meaning - Jesus our Saviour. Spend time in fellowship with Him, and receive the peace only He can provide. May you all have a very Blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with His love.

