

In the middle of Gaza stands St.Porphyrus Church, a Palestinian Orthodox Christian parish. The church was built in about 1160 and named for a fifth century bishop of Gaza. It is currently jammed with people, both Muslim and Christians, whose homes have been destroyed, and who have nowhere else to go. It is funny how the human spirit can respond to a spark of faith, even in the most despairing situations, even as despair can reign where people appear to have it all. There is a glimmer of hope in the walls, which have sustained life and faith in Gaza for almost a millennium, even if most of those years were clearly in happier times. In Christianity's early centuries, Gaza was a thriving center of monasticism, mostly hermits, who survived in a harsh desert wilderness. Gaza Palestinians have a very long history in their land, finding a living in a difficult natural environment. Only in the past half century has that rural habitat been converted to the most densely populated place on earth, the new harshness human-caused, the oppressor hostile to the spirit, not just the challenges of nature.

The people now huddled for refuge in the church are surrounded by the icons of those Gaza saints and in this difficult moment, find solace through their faith.

Another phenomenon of the current situation is solidarity. The divide between Christian and Moslem has disappeared. The solidarity is not born of political nor even ethnic alignment, but of the human spirit which can seek and find the compassion of God in crisis. "We are beggars, it is true," said Martin Luther on his deathbed, "But we are beggars before God." Already homeless, and mourning family and friends lost in the bombing, they face the fragility of their own mortality, fearing the bombing of the church. That should clearly be occasion for despair. Instead, they

are finding spiritual comfort, from the saints of Gaza (their elders), from each other, and of greatest importance, from their God.

It is where we find Jesus, on the day before his crucifixion, as he pleads with the Father, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39). It is not a response of fatalism, but of understanding in faith a larger picture, where God reigns.

Could there be a clue here? If I have all the stuff I can desire, if I live without oppression, in small danger, and with good opportunities if I bestir myself to find them, why am I in despair? What exactly is hopeless? The variable is the people in St. Porphyrius Church have faith, and share it. They in fact refuse to let their history of faith be taken from them, no matter what level the crisis.

Many times, we are caught up in silliness and pettiness in our churches and in our personal lives. Perhaps the decline of religion in our nation, is partly caused by these deviations from the main message we have been entrusted with. Left adrift, the population wanders, seeking meaning and love in all the wrong places. Not finding it, despair becomes the fallback position for many. In humility, perhaps we have something to learn from those in the humblest and most desperate position possible, the Palestinians of St. Porphyrius church.

AUTHOR'S UPDATE: Since the above was written, St. Porphyrius Church was bombed by the Israeli Air Force. Eighteen people, mostly children, were killed, many others injured. In the media interviews with the survivors, there was grief, but they all quietly reaffirmed their faith.

November 2023

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THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS



November 11th is Veterans Day in the United States, but that is not its original name. Originally it was known as Armistice Day – and still is in Europe. This day is when the fighting parties during World War I ended the war.

As I wrote in my last article, World War I was a horrific war. It was as if the European powers went mad. And the war destroyed the European State System that had developed over the centuries. Many monarchies perished, and many countries were reborn. It also planted the seeds that would ripen into World War II.

In the world of today, we are seeing war break out in several troubling spots. The war in Ukraine still has the potential to swallow up the rest of Europe in another major war. The conflict currently between Israel and Hamas also has the potential of creating a much larger Middle Eastern war. These are very troubling signs. And the ones who always pay the price for these conflicts are the average citizens and soldiers.

When I think of wars, I always try to remember the two World Wars. The first was unmitigated folly. The second was truly a war to stop evil. I am not wise enough to deduce which type of war these two current conflicts may morph into, but if they somehow

interconnect, we will soon see a new World War.

When I was in the Somme this past summer, I visited one of the most spirit-filled Cathedrals I have ever experienced. It was in Laon, France. The walls had pictures of people who prayed and were cured. Many of them prayed for intercession from a Lebanese Saint by the name of Charbel Makhlof. Many of these people credit their cures to his intercession. My guess also is that this cathedral is the home to many Arab Christians.

But there was something else there: a poem with a picture of the poet. It was in a little side chapel dedicated to those who died during World War I. I took a picture of the poem and have decided to include it in this issue of the Line for you. It is especially poignant as we approach Veterans Day and given the state of the world today. The poet was an Englishman who survived World War I, and the poem was in English. It is entitled "Blue, White, Red" and "Tri-Colour". However, this title is NOT a reference to the colors on the French or English or American flags. It is in reference to the three flowers used as memorials and remembrance.

UPDATE ►► Request for a Bishop Coadjutor

The Standing Committee for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints have closed nominations for our next Bishop Coadjutor. Since one of these men will be leading our Diocese in conjunction with our Bishop Ordinary, our other Bishops, our Vicars General and the rest of our Standing Committee, we ask for your prayers that the Holy Spirit will guide us in selecting the right man. I would ask that all our parishes, clergy and laity, pray that God will insure the correct man be selected for this very important job in keeping us within the One, True, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. To this end, Fr. Christopher Parrish of St. Luke's Chapel in the Hills has drafted the following prayer, which I hope will help you:

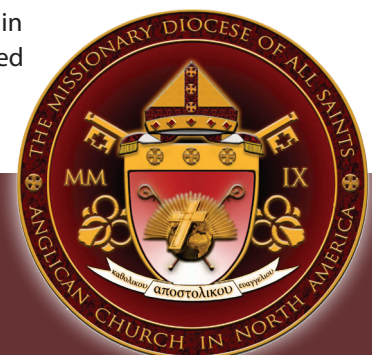
A Prayer for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints' Selection of a New Bishop Coadjutor

Almighty God, giver of every good gift. Look graciously upon Thy Holy Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a Bishop Coadjutor for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints that we may receive a faithful pastor who will preach the Gospel, care for Thy people, equip us for ministry, and lead us forth in fulfillment of the Great Commission: through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God bless,
Fr. Michael Penfield
Vicar General

The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.



**“Bleu, Blanc, Rouge”
“Tri-Colour”**

By Robert William Service

*Poppies, you try to tell me, glowing there in the wheat;
Poppies! Ah no! You mock me: It's blood, I tell you, it's blood.
It's gleaming wet in the grasses; it's glist'ning warm in the wheat;
It dabbles the ferns and the clover; it brims in an angry flood;
It leaps to the startled heavens; it smothers the sun; it cries
With scarlet voices of triumph from blossom and bough and blade.
See the bright horror of it! It's roaring out of the skies,
And the whole red world is a-welter...Oh God! I'm afraid! I'm afraid!*

*Cornflowers, you say, just cornflowers, gemming the golden grain;
Ah no! You can't deceive me. Can't I believe my eyes?
Look! It's the dead, my comrades, stark on the dreadful plain,
All in their dark-blue blouses, staring up at the skies.
See how they sprawl and huddle! See how their brows are white!
Goaded on to the shambles, there in death and defeat...
Father of Pity, hide them! Hasten, O God, Thy night!*

*Lilies (the light is waning), only lilies you say,
Nestling and softly shining there where the spear-grass waves.
No, my friend, I know better; brighter I see than day:
It's the poor little wooden crosses over their quiet graves.
Oh, how they're gleaming, gleaming! See! Each cross has a crown.
Yes, it's true I am dying; little will be the loss...
Darkness ... But look! Heaven a light, and it's shining down ...
God's accolade! Lift me up, friends. I'm going to win – my Cross.*

For those of you who may not know, in France, the blue cornflower and the red poppy are wildflowers that grow everywhere. To remember veterans, in England they wear a red poppy, and in France they wear a blue cornflower.

As I wrote earlier, I am not wise enough to know the future, but I do know that these localized wars are already spreading. I also know that we are pretty powerless, except for one thing – prayer. It is the most powerful spiritual tool we have. We need to pray for the protection of innocent people, both citizens and soldiers, dying on all sides. We need to pray for our leaders to act wisely and in a Christian manner. And we need to pray for a just peace. And, God willing, He will grant our prayers.



The poet Robert William Service

Amen and God bless.



By The Right Rev. Winfield Mott

As the car pulled away from our home for the last time, my teen-age sister was in the back seat, weeping. The dog and I were sitting next to her. I couldn't tell if my parents, in the front seat, were also weeping, but I knew they were very sad. They had never lived more than twenty miles away from their birthplaces and now were moving 1500 miles away, far from family and friends. Each had said goodbye to an elderly mother who they would never see again. But my Father had been unemployed for almost two years, and this new opportunity was necessary for economic survival.

I was ten years old, and also saying goodbye to the known universe, leaving behind friends, my favorite aunt and uncle, the creek and woods, the comforting old 18th century house, the school. Finally, the hot tears came down my face as well, as the reality of the car's progress past, and then beyond, the familiar neighborhood sunk in.

As the years went by, my young heart gradually healed and was absorbed by new experiences. But since that moving day a very long time ago, I have understood what it means to despair.

In our current world, looking at the people around me, I recognize a veritable epidemic of despair. It is counterintuitive in an affluent nation, potentially able to provide a comfortable life for all, medical care better than previous generations, superb communications, relative ease of travel and a host of other amenities. But there it is. Great riches do not produce great happiness, as disputes, divorces, diseases, depression seem to afflict so many of the quite wealthy. Poverty, as Tevye ("Fiddler on the Roof") points out, is no great honor, either. But we expect that people in want of material goods will be unhappy, and so we are not surprised. Yet, the lack of correlation between despair and prosperity should give us pause. Why is there an epidemic among us?

Perhaps some scenarios are in order.

The New Mexico county where I was a parish rector for a decade was one of the six poorest counties in the U.S. It was routinely number #1 or #2 in the nation for the rate of

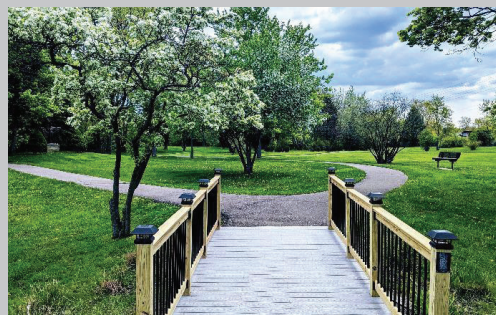
teen pregnancies. I asked a local midwife why she thought that number was so high. Without hesitation, she replied, "hopelessness." With grinding poverty, no job prospects, too poor of an education to go to college and no role models to the contrary, teenagers turned in despair to the only achievement left to them.

Tristan, in his late 'twenties, lives, rent-free, with his 85-year old grandmother in an affluent American community. He is unemployed, has no driver's license and no longer pretends to look for work. Like all his friends, he doesn't believe in God. This is not because they have developed an atheist philosophy, just that they do not see God as a reality or presence in their world. If you ask Tristan about his goals or his reason for living, he has no answer. Most of his friends try to find escape in drugs. Tristan doesn't use much, instead he simply stares blankly into the future, uncomprehending and hopeless. His despair is not from poverty, his grandmother meets his material needs. He is one of millions for whom affluence has no ability to bring them happiness. You can find despair in the midst of plenty.

Recently many have wondered why Hamas would mount the attack it did out of Gaza, well aware of the absolutely predictable result of terrible retaliation far worse than their attack. The likely answer is found in the despair of desperation born from multi-generational hopelessness, incarcerated apparently forever in what Cardinal Pizzaballa, the Latin (i.e Roman Catholic) Patriarch of Jerusalem has called "the world's largest outdoor prison." It is reminiscent of the Jewish Warsaw ghetto in World War II, which rose and attacked against hopeless odds, because lashing out seemed a better choice than passive acceptance of genocide, even if the likely consequence was retaliation and death.

Such examples of despair are myriad. Whether oppressed in an occupied territory or living freely and with wealth, despair is a major factor in modern society, and many appear to have no defense against it. Is there any way out, or are we doomed to conclude, with Camus, that there is "no exit?"

Let us start in Gaza, the depths of understandable despair.



Save the Dates!
The Missionary Diocese of All Saints
General Synod
April 2-5, 2024



St. Paul of the Cross Passionist Retreat Center
www.stpaulretreat.org
23333 Schoolcraft
Detroit, Michigan 48223
located 14 miles from airport (DTW)

Check-in Tuesday between 3-6 p.m. & depart Friday before noon