

Whitsunday (28 May 2023)

“...Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort...”

+In the Name...

“Overruled!” “Counselor, you’re out of order!” “The defense rests, your honor.” As a teen-ager I loved courtroom dramas. Just when it appeared as if all hope were lost for the wrongly-accused defendant, Perry Mason would pull the truth out of his back pocket and the guilty party would be left sobbing on the witness stand after confessing to all the wrongs committed. (For the record, a friend of mine who is a defense attorney says no one ever actually confesses on the witness stand, but it makes for a good Hollywood experience!)

I might have thought that such shows were unique to the time in American history when I was coming of age, but Perry Mason and Ben Matlock were hardly of the same generation. What’s more, after a

hiatus of 11 years, “Law & Order” has come back to primetime television. It seems that Americans cannot get enough of our courtroom dramas! And that does not include the so-called arbitration-based reality court shows such as “Judge Judy” and “The People’s Court”! No one breaks down on the stand there, so what is it that is so alluring to Americans? Is it our innate sense of justice? Is it our insatiable desire for fair play? Maybe it is the certainty of the veracity of the judgment at the end of the show. In real life, there are questions, uncertainties, defugalties, but with Matlock or Perry Mason, we know we have got our man. We know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the guilty party is being incarcerated and the innocent one returns to his jubilant family. We know that the right judgment has been handed down from the bench or jury box.

20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans are not the first humans to be interested in such things. Think back to the story or the wisdom of

Solomon from your Old Testament studies. He became the king of Israel upon the death of his father David, the famed killer of Goliath. God appeared to Solomon in a dream, asking Solomon what he most desired of God. Solomon answered that he desired wisdom, with which he could better rule God's people. Pleased with Solomon's request, God agreed to give it to him because he did not ask for things which merely benefitted himself like long life or the death of his enemies.

Our collect this morning asks God to allow us the judgment of the Holy Ghost in "all things". We do not have to worry about whether Judge Judy has missed any pertinent facts in the case at hand. We know that as a Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Ghost is omniscient, and knows and weighs all the facts before they are even presented to Him. As if knowing we will be recipients of the Truth is not enough, we are promised the "comfort", that is, the strengthening

of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost will illumine our minds with the discernment of the Truth, so we will know the right course of action. Sometimes knowing what is right is a challenge in itself, but even in times when it is obvious we need the Spirit to strengthen our wills so that we might accomplish God's will – and with joy! That is a tall order!

It puts it into perspective why this feast is so important in the Church Kalendar. Perhaps you know that Pentecost is actually the second biggest feast day of the year, after Easter. The reason for that is because in ancient times only pagans celebrated birthdays, so the Church was slow to celebrate Christmas. We know it is celebrated because of the importance of the Incarnation, God becoming man, and not because of party hats or pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey! God the Father created us, so that we might love Him. God the Son redeemed us, so that we might have eternal life with Him, and God the Holy

Ghost sanctified and sustains us, so that we might have the wherewithal to get up day after day and do battle against the challenges the devil and his minions throw at us.

Years ago I remember telling my Father Confessor about something in my life that was causing me to have serious doubts. “Be brave!” he told me. Not exactly penance, but good advice. More recently I was telling a friend about something that had been vexing me. I might call her a nominal Christian, but her advice (which usually is not particularly religious) on this issue was to pray for courage. Good advice in a consistently unrecognizable world.

Teachers always encourage students to ask questions, using the argument that others are probably wondering the same question to themselves. So in case you are thinking that you are the only one to experience a lack of courage, let’s take a look at a famous saint. Two days ago the Church celebrated the feast of St. Augustine of

Canterbury. He is particularly important to Anglicans because he reinvigorated Christianity in the British Isles after it had been nearly extinguished by heathen invaders. Augustine was not British, but an Italian monk. By all accounts he was perfectly content as the prior of St. Andrew's Monastery in Rome. He was well-educated and a good administrator, both important traits to have in a prior. But Pope Gregory asked him to lead a contingent of missionaries to Britain after Gregory saw some English boys for sale at a slave market in Rome. Gregory inquired about the fare-haired, blue-eyed boys and was told they were "Angles", as in from Angle-land. Gregory reportedly replied, "Not Angles, but angels!" But the important part of this story is that if you are a monk in Italy and the Bishop of Rome tells you to go to England, you are packing your bags and on your merry way. Augustine and his 40 companions did not get very far on the roughly 1,100-mile journey when they realized the full extent of what their task

was. The party stopped, but sent Augustine back to ask Gregory to allow them to return to Rome. Exercising pastoral care, Gregory did not just refuse their request, but sent Augustine back with letters of encouragement for the missionaries to persevere in the task lying before them. The rest is history: Augustine and his crew made it to England where they converted the King of Kent (his wife was already a Christian) and tens of thousands of his subjects. Augustine lived the rest of his life in Britain.

Perhaps Augustine was inspired by the words of Our Lord in the Gospel appointed for this morning: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” May we and all the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church experience the strengthening of the Holy Ghost, and face the world with the bravery of St. Augustine!

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