

Trinity IV (23 June 2024)

“I RECKON that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

+In the Name...

The Book of Common Prayer provides three options for the Office for the Dead. We do not use the full office here at St. Mark's often because we usually do a Requiem Mass at a funeral, which has a different set of readings. I eliminated one option immediately when choosing the text for Arthur Eagle's service yesterday. In an effort to think about something else, I read the readings for today's Mass. Imagine my delight when I discovered

that one of the options for the Office for the Dead is the same as the Epistle for this morning. So, I still get to use both texts, and those of you who were at the funeral yesterday are not getting the same sermon!

We buried Arthur Eagle yesterday, and he knew a lot about suffering. In my time here as your rector I know he faced a myriad of health problems. Not to take away from what he suffered, but we all have our crosses to bear. Chances are, most of us would rather carry our own than someone else's. We get used to our challenges and while they are still a nuisance (and sometimes worse than that), it can be an example of the devil you know being more tolerable than the devil you don't know.

St. Paul is not just looking to the end of an individual's life, when indeed a person will stop suffering the physical challenges that this world throws at a person. (And we know that it can be many.) He is looking farther afield, when all will be made right with the world. He is looking forward to the restoration of the

world as it was before the Fall, before sin had come into the world through the pride of mankind. (Nearly all sin has its origin in pride, does it not? I am right and someone else is wrong! Not that I have ever had any of those moments...!) But one can see how this ties into that portion of the Gospel chosen for this morning: “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:” I have probably mentioned before a study we read in my ethics class when I was in seminary: when surveyed, a majority of Americans like there to be rules... for *other* people to follow! We think that the rules should be out there, but naturally, we always have an excuse not to follow those rules, but the other guy should be forced to follow them. Either because our reasons for not following them are so extraordinary to merit not following them, or because we are so superior we could never be in the predicament that *other* people find themselves, thus necessitating following the rule. “Those people make mistakes and therefore

need to follow the rules, whereas I would never falter that way,” we reason with ourselves.

I had an interesting situation recently: I received a call at the church from a woman. (Not a parishioner, so you know that I am not telling a story about someone in the pew next to you.) The conversation ended with her telling me she was going to email me some necessary information. The time within which she said she would send the information came and went, but no email from this person. She had not given me any of her contact information, so I had no way to reach her. Sometime later she did contact me again and offered the excuse, “Oh, I thought I emailed it to you.” “Yeah, right, “I thought to myself. “Sure, she did. Isn’t that a convenient excuse? ‘I thought I did.’ No one can argue with that because only she knows what she *thought* she did. I have no idea what is going on in her mind. You would think with something this important she would have made sure.” Now fast forward to one of the many bulletins that were printed up this week. Alastair

informed me that he had to look up something on the internet in order to find some necessary information for a bulletin. “Didn’t you get my email?” I demanded. I immediately started looking through old emails. Much to my chagrin, I had started the email but never sent it. Likely I was interrupted by someone or something, but the fact remains that I had done the same thing as what I had accused my acquaintance of doing! The similarity could not have been more striking had it been written by a team of Hollywood writers. I had done *exactly* what I had accused my phone caller of doing, almost using the same exact verbiage.

Perhaps it will make you feel better to know that this selection for the epistle was used for one of the seasonal Embertides rather than for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity. (The Ember Days are when we pray for vocations in the Church.) The logic is that the members of the clergy and teachers of religion are especially prone to judging others without judging ourselves. I agree that we are, but it is by no means limited to us, especially in

a relatively new jurisdiction where we exist because the Mother Church strayed too far from the received doctrine to any longer be recognizable.

The Christian author Dorothy Sayers said that our egos tend to be inflated the more success we experience. Using that logic, many Americans could fall into that category, especially as compared to the rest of the world. But success by the world's standards does not always translate into success by God's standards. Yesterday the Church celebrated the feast of St. Alban, the first English-born martyr for the Faith. He was not raised to be a Christian, but met a priest who was being persecuted and agreed to give him shelter. Alban was so impressed by him that he was converted to the Faith. As the authorities approached, Alban dressed in the priest's clothes so that the priest could get a head start in his escape. When Alban was caught, his duplicity was discovered and he was told to offer incense to the pagan gods.

Alban was new to the Faith, so he could have pled ignorance: “I did not know I could not offer incense – just this once!”

Arthur and Alban no longer have to tolerate the sufferings of this present time, and for that we are grateful. Lord Christ, help us to follow the guiding light of Thy truth, and not allow ourselves to be blinded by pride and self-love.

+In the Name...