

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

20 Pentecost  
September 28, 2008  
Fr. Bill McGinty

**“The End is the Beginning!”**

Today is the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost. It is a day when as usual we gather to worship and celebrate. The great bell tolls and we meet and turn our thoughts and minds to God, Our Father. At the 10 o'clock service, the hymn that we sing is: “For all the Saints...” reminding us of the long line of tradition in which we stand. It is a hymn that tells us what those men and women stood for, and in what they placed their trust. They stood, worked, believed and trusted in the person of Jesus, their rock their fortress, their Captain, their might.

As we gather to worship this morning, it reminds me that it is a hymn I love to sing, when I am angry, annoyed, bad tempered and even depressed, but spoiling for a fight. As hard as it may be to imagine your Pastor being any of those things, I can list the ways and the causes and on both hands. They usually start out with Bishops, authority figures, other clergy, politics, time, injustice, the media and from time to time Oprah Winfrey or David Letterman.

I love to sing this hymn because it tells me why I am here, what truly matters and most important who I work for.

“O may thy soldiers, faithful true and bold, fight as the saints who nobly fought of old; and win with them the Victors crown of gold Alleluia-Alleluia.”

I think that from time to time we do need to stop and take a stand and evaluate who we are, what we are doing and what we stand for. Have you ever caught yourself saying things you do not believe, or know to be untrue, just because you don't want to upset someone else?

It seems to me that we nice people are, by that I mean Christians, always doing it, and we do it to appease cranky, moody, bullying people who we don't like anyway. We get downright sycophantic to the extent that we keep quiet about our true beliefs and even our politics because someone we are talking to, is so far left or so extreme right that we know that contradicting them, we will see them blow a gasket. Instead we keep quiet, or 'yes' the person till they leave.

I have done it to Bishops and school principals all my life: “What a wonderful book you wrote last year bishop, everyone is talking about it. It helped me get through the winter.”

I didn't mean that. I meant: “Bishop I used your stupid book to light the log fire in the basement.” Sadly we never say it.

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Nor did I tell the New Jersey head teacher, that his statue of Mary he had built in front of the school, reminded me of the launch of a space rocket from Cape Kennedy in the sixties.

Instead I tell him: “Now wouldn’t your loving and holy mother back in County Galway be so proud you dedicated your life’s work to the Blessed Virgin, Monsignor, your holiness.”

I keep meaning to ask Sandy Beecher my revered and senior college, see there I go again, whether at 60 a little bell or voice goes off in your head that says: “Cut the nonsense!” It is like the point of no return.

I think all of us as Christians have to reach that point of no return. We have put up with excuses and mediocrity all our lives and now we are long passed standing for it.

1. Child labor and abuse of children in Asian countries, we hate it and we refuse to buy their goods.
2. Bad movies, with violence and immoral content we refused to give them the time of day.
3. Politics, corruption, earmarks and pork barrel legislation, we have had enough.
4. We have had enough of spousal abuse and crime on our streets, road rage and being ripped off by the grocery store and the telephone company. We don’t want our children taught by teachers, who do not grade homework and are riding it out, till retirement. We want local government that works and neighborhoods of God fearing people.

Most of all, we want to stop being afraid to profess our faith and our beliefs openly. We want to feel proud that Jesus Christ is a significant and meaningful part of our lives. We want to feel that America stands for something in the world. We have crossed the Red Sea. We have so often taken on the desert of disbelief that we find in our society. We come to church to strike the rock and receive the grace that Jesus has won for us.

St. Paul in writing to the Philippians in our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading feels the urgency of that commitment to Jesus too. He tells his converts in Philippi that it is time “to go all the way in the commitment of their lives to Jesus and the Gospel.” “Let the same mind be in you as was in Christ Jesus.”

Paul himself is passed caring what anyone thinks of him. He is old, under house arrest and soon to be executed. He can see the end and now he throws caution to the wind.

‘He begs for the Philippians to take their own salvation into their own hands. Surely, that should and must be the case with each of us also. Our experience of the world and our society has taught us that hoping things will get better, has never made things better. We have lost enough hair and sleep to know that things only change when we ourselves decide to change them.

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Last week Elizabeth Geitz showed us a DVD of the orphanage in Cameroon that underlined this principle. It told us what happens when one African woman stood up and decided to act on behalf of poor and abandoned children.

Did it not want to make you do something? Didn't you want to go there and help? Did you want to put a trip together? We would be less than human if we didn't.

Last weeks 10 o'clock service raised 1,250 dollars for the children's Christmas Fund. As long as you keep giving money to the discretionary fund, I will keep giving it away. These children have genuine and true heart-break stories. They need us and in our age of materialism, we need them.

Jesus in the Gospel asks: "What are you going to do? Your lives are more than half over. Are you going to do the will of my Father or are you going to say "yes" to the Gospel and then never go do it."

You see that is the point for Christians isn't it? We read about the Gospel, we admire Jesus, we believe in Christ's message. So why do we wait? Why do we not go all the way? Why don't we commit heart, soul and mind to the war that this great hymn speaks about?

"And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long, steals on the ear the distant triumph song, and hearts are brave again and arms are strong, al-le-lu-ia, al-le-lu-ia."

Doesn't that make your heart race just a little? Doesn't it make you feel you want to fight? You want to make a difference. You may be tired yet words and worship remind all of us Christians that for us the end is just the beginning.

It is time to rally behind our old Episcopal flag once more and renew the fight. Particularly to renew the fight for those who cannot fight back; the poor here and in Cameroon; the abused, particularly in October, "Paint Pike County Purple Month;" our food pantry, the children and staff of the Child Care Center.

Yesterday two old warriors turned out for you, me and our church to work through one more flea market. They have done it before many times, but they were younger then and had not gone through serious illness. Yesterday they led us and carried us. Doris and Richard Rogers. Oh they will leave us soon to head south for the winter, but if anyone deserves these words it is Doris and Richard.

"The golden evening brightens in the west'  
Soon, soon to faithful warrior's cometh rest;  
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest.  
Alleluia. Alleluia."

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Thank you both.

Maestro, choir, Let us stand and sing verses 6, 7, and 8 just for them.

Let us sing it for our warriors. Let us sing it for Doris and Richard, who carried the flag,  
and carried it for you and me.

Amen+