

THE EPISTLE - March, 2010

Dear Friends:

With this edition of *The Epistle* we are deep into the season of Lent. For many its solemn tone has begun to diminish, and there is the desire to get on with it. But as I said in an earlier sermon, Lent is a time for hard work, prayer, and meditation. What follows is a series of vignettes for use as you continue through the season and the work that comes with it.

In this age of mixing religion and political posturing Frei Betto gives us a portrait of the God who was in Christ as he made his way in the wilderness to Calvary:

The God of My Faith

— *A Credo by Frei Betto*

I don't believe in the god of the magistrates
nor in the god of the generals
nor in patriotic prayers. I don't believe in the god of funeral hymns
nor in the god of courtrooms nor in the prologues of constitutions
and epilogues of eloquent discourses. I don't believe in the god of the luck of the rich
nor in the god of fear of the opulent
nor in the happiness of those who rob the people. I don't believe in the god of a false peace
nor in the god of an unpopular justice
nor in venerated national traditions. I don't believe in the god of empty sermons
nor in the god of protocol greetings
nor in marriage without love. I don't believe in the god constructed
in the image and likeness of the powerful
nor in the god invented as a sedative for the miseries and suffering of the poor.
I don't believe in the god who sleeps in the walls
or hides in the coffers of the churches. I don't believe in the god of commercials
nor in the god of brightly colored propaganda. I don't believe in this god made of lies
as breakable as clay, nor in the god of the established order
over an agreed-upon disorder.
The God of my faith was born in a cave. He was a Jew, who was persecuted by a foreign king
and walked as a vagrant through Palestine. He sought the company of common folk,
gave bread to those who were hungry,
light to those who lived in darkness,
freedom to those who were in chains,
peace to those who asked for justice. The God of my faith puts people above the law
and love in place of old traditions. He doesn't have a rock on which to lay his head
and is taken for one of the poor. He only met the doctors
when they doubted his word. He was with judges,
who managed to condemn him. He was seen among the police,
a prisoner. He stepped into the palace of the governor
to be whipped. The God of my faith wore a crown
of thorns. He wore a tunic all woven in blood.
He had forerunners who opened the road for him to Calvary,
where he died among thieves
on the cross. The God of my faith
is none other than the son of Mary,
Jesus of Nazareth. Every day he dies,
crucified by our selfishness. Every day he rises, by the strength of our love.

- *Frei Betto works as an adviser to the base Christian community movement in Brazil.*

—from *The Other Side* (May—June 1993).

Additional Thoughts on Lent....

The following is a prayer attributed to St. Benedict, and it has always seemed to me to be an appropriate reminder for us during the days of Lent.

*Almighty God
Give us wisdom to perceive thee,
Intellect to understand thee,
Diligence to seek thee,
Patience to wait for thee,
Vision to behold thee,
A heart to meditate upon thee,
A life to proclaim thee.
Amen.*

And the following might help keep the experience of Lent in perspective.

LENT

*Lent is
Forty days till Easter
Not counting Sundays.*

*Lent is actually
Six and a half weeks
Of very violet repentance
And very purple passion.*

*Lent is
Watching a man go to his death
And not being able to stop it.*

*Lent is
Helping send him
To the cross.*

*Lent is
Not getting off
The hook.*

*Lent is
Taking sin seriously,
Taking life seriously,
Taking death seriously,
Taking everything seriously,
Taking everything
More seriously
Than usual.*

*Lent is
Six more weeks
Of shivering
In the cold.*

*Lent is
Not a very happy time.
But it is what
You have to go through
To get to Easter.*

Lent - Wayne Saffen from Second Season (Fortress Press, 1973)

And since the last Sunday in March is Palm Sunday what follows are some thoughts about that incredible day.

The meaning of the act [riding into Jerusalem] becomes clear when we realize that he was intentionally enacting a passage from the prophet Zechariah which spoke of a king, of peace riding "on a colt, the foal of an ass." He was not mechanically fulfilling a prophecy; rather, he chose a known symbol from his tradition in order to say that the kingdom of which he spoke was a kingdom of peace, not war. If the language is not too modern, his entry was a planned political demonstration, an appeal to Jerusalem to follow the path of peace, even as it proclaimed that his movement was the peace party in a generation headed for war. It also implied that the alternative of peace was still open. —*Marcus Borg, copied*

What would not I have given to be able to bow my head before the living image at the Vatican of Christ Crucified! It was not without a wrench that I could tear myself away from that scene of living tragedy. I saw there at once that nations, like individuals, could only be made [new] through the agony of the Cross and in no other way. Joy comes not out of affliction of pain on others, but out of pain voluntarily borne by oneself. —*Mohandas Gandhi, quoted.*

And finally, Frederick Buechner has written in *The Faces of Jesus* (Harper & Row, 1989):

"If death was to be truly defeated, it was only by dying himself that Jesus believed he could defeat it. If he was to reach the hearts of men, it was only by suffering his own heart to be broken that he believed he could reach them. To heal the sick and restore sight to the blind; to preach good news to the poor and liberty to the captives; to wear himself out with his endless teaching and traveling the whole length and breadth of the land—it had not worked because it was not enough. There had to be more. 'He set his face to go to Jerusalem,' the Gospel says, and it was a journey from which he seems to have known that he would both never return and return always even unto the end of time and beyond."

As we move through these incredibly powerful and moving weeks, we can only look with hope to the new life that the first Sunday in April brings with it – the Sunday of the Resurrection.

Allan+

✠ **DIOCESAN CONVENTION DELEGATES REPORT:** On February 14th, Kathleen Harwood, Donna Guess and JoAnn Palmer attended the first Midlands Convocation Meeting for 2010. At the meeting two Youth Deputies, one a member of St. John's, Columbia, the other a member of St. Michael and All Angels, were elected. (*Note: Two Youth Deputies are elected annually from each Convocation and have voice and vote at Diocesan Conventions.*)

Julie Price, Canon for Finance and Administration, presented the following information.

1. Haiti: Donations to the Bread and Water Project and Bread and Water - Rescue have been received from this Diocese and from other states and countries. To date, the Project has received \$123,509, and now has more than \$500,000 for the water project; Rescue has received \$71,642. The Diocese also received donations in the amount of \$10,000 for Episcopal Relief and Development. Donations will continue to be appropriately distributed as they come in.
2. Update on activities related to the consecration of the 8th Bishop of EDUSC: A website is being developed that will provide up-to-date information. A notice will be sent out when it is active with a message encouraging people to check it frequently. She also reported that the Consecration, on May 22 at Christ Church, Greenville, will be available via web cast and that CDs will also be available.

✠ **THE UNITED THANK OFFERING (UTO) IS A MINISTRY OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH!!**

To achieve this Mission, we encourage daily prayers, offerings, and awareness of the abundance of God's blessings. The United Thank Offering is a SPIRITUAL and FINANCIAL PARTNER in the mission work of The Episcopal Church. The UTO is not a fund drive but a discipline in our daily life in Christ wherein we offer prayers of thanksgiving for our countless blessings. (Read that sentence again and think about it.)

The UTO began in 1889 with Julia Emery, who was looking for new ways to have a vibrant ministry. In early years it was collected at the General Convention and used to train women in the church and sending women missionaries overseas. The United Offering became the United Thank Offering in the year 1919 as thanks for the end of WWI. In 1952, Bishop Gordon of Alaska was awarded UTO money for an airplane in order to reach his parishes. He coined the phrase "Blue Box" and the plane in its honor. In 1970 the United Thank Offering Committee was established. UTO began a new millennium by granting over \$3 million.

What happens to the money collected in the BLUE BOXES? All the money collected in the Blue Boxes is granted once per year. The UTO makes the grant awards in the two years between General Conventions. In a Convention year, The Board recommends grants to the delegates of the Triennial Meeting of the Episcopal Church Women.

Please note that money can be collected from the entire family. If the Box is full put the money in an envelope, turn it in and use the Box again. When the day for "INGATHERING" is announced, empty your coins in an envelope (or two), give to the Coordinator, and start working on another Box for the next Ingathering. If you need a BLUE BOX just let me know. *Marjorie Pratt, UTO Coordinator*

✠ **STAND, SIT OR KNEEL?**

Have you wondered, on a Sunday Morning, why some people stand while others kneel, some people kneel while others sit, some people sit while others stand? Does it confuse or distract you? A visit to a number of Episcopal Church websites revealed that most agreed that practices vary among parishes and even among individual Episcopalians in the *same parish*. They also agree that the general rule is to **Stand** to sing (hymns, canticles – and the Psalms at St. Stephen's), to say the

Creed, and for the reading of the Gospel; to **Sit** during readings from the Old Testament and the New Testament Letters, the sermon and anthems sung by the choir; and to **Stand or kneel** for prayer.

The Book of Common Prayer provides directions for when to stand, sit or kneel in the rubrics (written directions *in italics* for the conduct of worship that precede different parts of the liturgy), but that direction is not always absolute – in other words, a choice may be given. For example, in Holy Eucharist Rite II you will see “*The people stand or kneel*”; in Holy Eucharist Rite I you will see “*The people kneel or stand*”. In each case the first named is the **preferred** posture, but the other is acceptable. Reasons why someone chooses one over the other might include (1) learned behavior - the custom of the church s/he grew up in or the first church attended regularly; (2) the liturgical season – Lent vs. Easter; (3) a ‘spiritual compass’ which leads the person to choose one over the other at any given time; (4) what the majority of the congregation is doing. There are times when the rubric gives a specific direction. For example: in Rite II following the sermon the rubric says “*On Sundays and other Major Feasts there follows, all standing*” after which come The Nicene Creed, The Prayers of the People, The Confession of Sin and the Peace; in Rite I the people, having stood for The Nicene Creed and with no rubric directing them to kneel for the Prayers of the People, are directed in the invitation to confession to “... make (your) humble confession to Almighty God, *devoutly kneeling*.”; and in A Penitential Order: Rite II, we find the rubric “*The Decalogue may be said, the people kneeling*.” Finally, what about people who sit when the liturgy calls for standing or kneeling? There are two likely, and perfectly acceptable, reasons: (1) they are members of another denomination or religion (or neither) and are not comfortable following the rubric or what other people are doing; or (2) they have a physical condition that makes standing and/or kneeling difficult, painful, or both; or, because of that condition, must limit standing/kneeling to those parts of the liturgy that are most important to them in the worship experience. (Note: In the absence of either of the preceding reasons we should stand or kneel, as appropriate.)

Perhaps the most important message is that whatever you choose to do – stand, sit or kneel, let your choice be one that draws you fully into the worship experience.

✘ SOME PEW & COMMUNION RAIL ETIQUETTE SUGGESTIONS...

You’re already seated in your pew and someone enters the pew behind you and pulls down the kneeler: Slide forward a little so the person can put his or her hands on the back of your pew. This allows them to kneel upright rather than having to lean back.

“Before the service, speak to and with God. During the service, let God speak to you. After the service, speak to one another.”

At the communion rail: (1) If you don’t want the wine, cross your arms with the fingers of each hand on opposite shoulders. The long-standing doctrine of the church is that receiving in one kind - that means the host - is full reception of the Sacrament. (2) We drink the wine from a common cup. When it comes to you, grasp the bottom of the chalice, **not the rim**, guide it to your lips, tilt up *slightly* to receive the wine and then tilt down *slightly* when you’re done. If you don’t help, you may get more wine than you expected, or none at all. (3) Intinction: The policy of the Diocese, and the tradition at St. Stephen’s, is for the Chalice Bearer to take the host, dip it in the wine, and place it on the tongue of the recipient. On the advice of medical experts over the years, “one hand in the chalice (that of the Chalice-bearer) is much less likely to spread anything contagious than the many hands of those receiving.” But, because of concerns about the flu and flu-like viruses, Fr. Belton has provided a small chalice for those who prefer to intinct themselves. (4) Remain at the communion rail until the next person has finished receiving the wine before getting up, or turning if you stand to receive, to go back to your seat. This avoids the risk of bumping the person and perhaps causing the wine to spill.

✘ **Good Friday Offering – April 2:** For 150 years, the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East has borne, in a special way, the responsibility of sharing the cross of Jesus. By helping to maintain the Christian witness in the Holy Land, by serving all of God’s people there in a variety of ministries throughout four dioceses, by proclaiming the gospel and promoting justice, peace and love, the church serves us all. Since 1922, Episcopalians in the United States have supported the ministries of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East through the **Good Friday Offering**. It is vital that we continue to share in this burden, and not let our brothers and sisters in Jerusalem carry the cross alone. *You can support this ministry with a check, payable to the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society (write Good Friday Offering on memo line of check), or a loose offering on Good Friday.*

✘ **March Birthdays:** *O God, our times are in your hand: look with favor, we pray, on your servants as they begin another year. Grant that they may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen their trust in your goodness all the days of their lives. BCP*

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|---------------|------|------------------|------|-------------|------|
| Mike Swofford | 3/4 | Sarah Arndt | 3/16 | Jim Milling | 3/26 |
| Porter Reyes | 3/11 | Matthew Langdale | 3/20 | | |
| Ashley Lever | 3/13 | Marjorie Pratt | 3/22 | | |

✘ **March Dates:**

2 Lenten Study, 10:30am and 6:30pm, Parish Hall
4 ECW Meeting, 6:00pm, Parish Hall
9 Lenten Study, 10:30am and 6:30pm, Parish Hall
10 Healing Service, 6:00pm, Church
16 Lenten Study, 10:30am and 6:30pm, Parish Hall
17 Mission Committee Meeting, 6:00pm, Parish Hall
23 Lenten Study, 10:30am and 6:30pm, Parish Hall
24 Healing Service, 6:00pm, Church
28 Palm Sunday - The Sunday of the Passion
30 Lenten Study, 10:30am and 6:30pm, Parish Hall

✘ **April Dates - Holy Week and Easter:**

1 Maundy Thursday Service, 6:30pm, Parish Hall
2 Good Friday Service, 6:30pm, Parish Hall
3 The Sunday of the Resurrection – Easter Sunday

✘ **Event/Date not yet determined:** Community Easter Egg Hunt