

THE EPISTLE

OF SAINT PAUL'S PARISH—K STREET

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Drawing Closer to God

Dear Friends:

I knew – or at least I hoped – exactly how this May Epistle letter would run. Back in the last days of February and first few days of March it seemed we had a draft strategic plan to present to the Vestry. I was energized, excited, optimistic; a date had been set for our working group, our consultant, our vestry to all come together for the first round of presentations. And my happy intention had been for some very positive updates to be ready by this edition.

And then: everything changed. Once again our plans and strategies and best laid thoughts get blown away, as God turns us back to the present moment and its needs; back to a new and special calling to the Church. What at first seemed to be an annoying hiatus – some kind of overgrown snow storm – has eased into a new normal, and is surely impacting the shape and direction of all organizational planning.

Crisis always brings opportunity: the kind of "interruption" nobody wants, but which insists that we think again and act; that we reconsider and we respond. On a much smaller scale, I always find that spontaneous instances of "present moment ministry" are those that draw us closest to God's call: unscheduled masses in response to sudden disaster and crucial community needs; committee meetings abandoned to allow urgent pastoral care; new and unforeseen possibilities



THE REV'D RICHARD WALL

and gifts, calling into question previous priorities.

Within this upheaval I am gradually establishing some kind of routine and rhythm; perhaps you are finding the same. Previous routines are now largely obsolete – for many of you, I know, even the basic shape and pattern of the working day.

Navigating any kind of wilderness, within or without, is always a strange and disorienting experience. Another priest on one of the infinite zoom webinars put it like this: *I'm working harder, and I'm sleeping more.* It stayed with me, despite its apparent paradox, as I relate to that contradictory dynamic – and perhaps you do too. We are all working harder, and working in unfamiliar ways and with new brands of intensity and stress. Dining room tables have turned into offices. Many of you work with one hand, and care for children

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ST. PAUL'S PARISH SEEKS TO RESTORE ALL PEOPLE TO GOD AND TO EACH OTHER, THROUGH SACRAMENTAL WORSHIP AND CHRIST-LIKE LIVING.

THE EPISTLE

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with the other. Zoom is the medium for business meetings, client consultations, family dinners, and even sacramental confessions.

And yet – simultaneously – there are now new possibilities for flexibility and space. I don't mean to suggest that anybody has more free time: more that the shape and structure of our days are being reshaped in ways that open up time that is suddenly unscheduled and relatively blank. For example, I find that days are packed but evenings – typically the time slot for so much formation, ministry, meetings – are less so. Days no longer have to begin at 4am or end at 11pm.

A recent NYT piece poked some gentle fun at how we are using the "extra time": *Stop Trying to Be Productive*. It looks at the ways we are channeling our energy in new directions: epic home renovation projects; mastering some new skill to genius level; beginning a terrifying exercise challenge. The article suggests that somehow our brains are wired to overachieve, and we have forgotten how to flip the switch: to remember that every last nanosecond of the day does not have to be goal oriented, or geared to profit or personal gain. Hobbies, interests, pastimes become new arenas in which we compete, against others or just ourselves, rather than a means to simply relax and enjoy. Or, we decide that we must either excel – or completely abandon.

Perhaps this refocusing and outpouring of energy is simply our (entirely understandable) way of keeping afloat during the stress and uncertainty of these times – although, ironically, that somehow leads to layering stress upon stress. It reminds me of sage advice from an Abbot of Worth: busyness is ultimately a choice; the serious work of self-discovery and self-examination demands mastery of stillness and silence.

In the 6th century Benedict wrote

a Rule that sought to establish discipline and balance in the lives of those who seek to follow Jesus; his Rule is available online, and is an excellent companion to these strange times. Benedict brought together daily work, rest, meals, retraction, study, prayer in a dynamic synthesis, each depending on and allowing space for the other – and all, of course, happening under one roof. I wonder if our lives are currently being given opportunity for a Benedictine reset? A chance to rethink our days and hours, our own personal sense of balance, and to restore what has been lost. When this pandemic finally ends can we emerge with our lives, desires, time, priorities re-balanced for the best? From the perspective of faith, the Queen spoke in her recent speech of new space in our days for prayer and meditation: I hope we can retain that same space once lives return to some version of normal.

It sounds a tall order – but, to Benedict, we are all mere novices – all incomplete, all with the capacity to learn and develop. What matters ultimately is our perseverance – our persistence – our determination to commit to something and to see it through. Improvement, to Benedict, is some version of conversion of life: a journey in which we move and change inch-by-inch, day-by-day, with a commitment to living faithfully, keeping eyes and minds open, and always being willing to be surprised. When we fail: we begin again. And – perhaps most crucially – we do so free from dismal stories but with optimism and good cheer.

Happier times are ahead. In the meantime, I and your church are here with you and for you in any way that we can.

This comes, as always, with my love & prayers
- Fr Richard



2020 Liturgy of Light by Zoom

Gwyneth Zakaib

On Easter Day 2020, the children of St. Paul's may have missed parading around in their special dresses and suits, celebrating in Sunday school, and hunting eggs in the courtyard. But they didn't have to miss seeing one another and praying together.

At 10am that morning, CGS leaders Ali and Preston Winter organized a short Liturgy of the Light service. Families logged in via Zoom to wave, smile, and exchange hellos as they gathered around their computer screens.

Everyone lit a candle, sang hymns, and rang bells. Children followed along in their leaflets, the older ones read and chanted, and the younger ones either watched curiously or

protested quietly. The Eikels even participated from their home in Connecticut.

It was altogether a delight to celebrate, sing, and pray together. What a wonderful way to make us feel once again like a community when we are so far apart. Thank you to everyone who made it happen!



Liturgy of Light 2020

2020 Palm Sunday Reflection

Doug Worthington, Seminarian

Oh, how good it was to sing again 'in' church on Sunday! After a couple of weeks of low mass—and how thankful we were for that offering, as we came to live into life in the time of COVID—on Palm Sunday we once again came to the altar of God with hymns, service music, a chanted psalter, etc. And for me, from the first notes of the "All glory, laud and honor," it was purely glorious!

It is interesting how, in life, it isn't merely the absence of something (or someone) we love or rely upon that draws us to reflection, but more often its subsequent return. In refilling of the hole, we learn just how deep or wide it was. And so, as we began to sing—from our scores of different homes, and even though we couldn't all hear one another (only the wonderful quartet)—a rush of spiritual emotion came over me. First, I was singing again! This is what I know to do in church; it's the first way I learned how to 'be' church, way back in first grade when I joined the Primary Choir. There is, for me, something fundamental about singing (and listening to others sing) in church, such that when it is missing, my own experience of church is somehow just a little less when it isn't present. God and God's grace are no less present, but perhaps, somehow, I am.

Second, singing is something we all do together, as a community. The hearty singing of a hymn, the nuanced chanting of a psalm (with Jeffrey's always-present dynamic marks, thank you!): We unite in one voice to the Lord. Yes, we do this in prayers, in the Creed and in other moments of worship, but there is something more visceral (we sing from the gut, after all), more impassioned (hymns have dynamics, tempo and text color that make them more expressive than

unison speaking) and more vulnerable (not all of us sing well, and all of us, from time-to-time, sing a wrong note or have eyes that wander to the wrong stanza) in singing ... that makes it so much more an act of corporate devotion, of shared soul-expressing and soul-bearing. This, this is why the Church should never stop singing, even as the rest of the world is increasingly content merely to consume music, rather than use God's gifts to sing it.

And third, it is just *right* to sing to and about Our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the most important thing we know, and we must use every fiber of our being to praise and proclaim Him and be His. He is the most joyful thing we know, so we have to employ the breadth of our physical being to embody His joy and teach it—over and over again—to ourselves, to our neighbors and to anyone else who happens to be listening. And He is the most profound thing we know: the incarnation of the transcendent, the death of the eternal, the eternalization of life, and, we pray in good hope, the ultimate divinization of humanity. How

can mere speaking—something we do all day, every day—fully capture for us an existential grasp and appreciation of all that Christ is and does and so graciously provides? How can we know the profundity of the Cross and the Empty Tomb merely cognitively and not also with our being and our breath? How can we not unite our minds, our bodies and our hearts in a self-giving, inhibition-conquering, all-out attempt to glimpse something of Him who gives us life and purpose and our very souls, in this world and the next?

Wherever we worship, whoever is sitting beside us (or if we sit in isolation), whether we ever again physically receive the most precious Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood (and we *will*), may we always unite our hearts and our voices in singing our love and adoration of and devotion to Our Savior. For when we sing in church, I think, we verge upon expressing the fullest measure of the limit-defying, hope-rooting, eternally-saving, always-abiding very language of God.



Bringing Easter Joy: Simnel Cake Tradition

Gwyneth Zakaib



Delivering Simnel Cakes

Laureen Vance's delicious Simnel cakes have become an Easter staple in recent years. She bakes and sells at least a dozen as a fundraiser for the church.

As I was yearning for one tiny taste on Easter Eve, I sent her a note saying they would be greatly missed.

To my surprise and delight, she offered to bake one for me and one for my parents. (They, too, enjoy this yearly tradition!) After all, she had already collected the ingredients for all the cakes over the preceding months and had them ready to go in her house.

When I offered to deliver a few more to parishioners around town, Laureen (as only Laureen could do) whipped up and iced eight entire cakes. Seven hours and twenty phone calls later, she delivered them to my parents, wrapped in various portion sizes.

On Easter morning, wearing their masks and toting their hand sanitizer, my parents made the long journey from Bowie to Northern Virginia to

drop them off. There we greeted each other from behind masks, wished each other a happy Easter from a safe distance, and unloaded the cakes from one car and loaded them into another. Slowly but surely, they made their way onto the Easter dinner tables of some very cheery parishioners from St. Paul's.

I only wish we could have delivered them more widely! Thank you to Laureen for spreading a bit of Easter joy, and to the parishioners who supported her fundraiser this year. It was truly wonderful to see everyone! Proceeds will go to the Foggy Bottom Food Pantry.



Simnel cake deliveries in DC, Bethesda, Arlington, Alexandria and Springfield!

A New Order for Daily Offices

Editor's Note: Long-time members, former members, new members are all finding a way to worship together during the crisis. Twice daily twenty-five to forty people join in the Daily Offices by Zoom. Below are comments from the people who joined in on the day we captured the screenshots below (and published with their kind permission).



Grant Hildebrand

I can't begin to relate to the parish what Morning & Evening Prayer on Zoom and the Noon Mass on Facebook means to me as a shut-in during this siege. Seeing all the familiar faces and praying with them has created quite a sense of connectivity for me. Also, although being denied the physical Nave during Holy Week and Easter, Fr. Richard and everyone involved made a spiritual Nave in my heart for which I am eternally grateful.

Megan Murton

Zoom Morning Prayer has been a wonderful way to make the Daily Office part of my life. This is a habit I've been wanting to form for years but couldn't quite manage to sustain on my own. I especially appreciate that Dominic can be part of it - even though he spends most of the time eating, playing, and closely examining other people's video feeds, especially if he spots a pet! I still think he notices that prayer has become part of the rhythm of our shared life, and I love having a way to include him in my worship without having to worry

about keeping him entertained or disrupting anyone else.

Anne Windle

I often attend morning and evening prayer via Zoom. During the stay-at-home order, it has been a nice way to give structure to the day and to see some of my fellow parishioners.

Andrew Weller

I've been working from home for four weeks, which is a new experience for me. In researching how one successfully does such, consistent counsel was the importance of routine in order to anchor one's self. I've been grateful for gam Matins each day as not only a way to help add routine to my day but as spiritual and communal way to start my day. As someone relatively new to DC and St. Paul's, I now even know the names of some fellow parishioners I've been seeing around church!

Jeanne Smith

During our unfortunate incarceration occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic, I have found the SPKS Zoom Daily Offices to be a wonderful reminder of the stability of our tradi-

tions. Also, worshipping in community amongst so many friendly faces set in their home turf reminds me of God's presence among us both during this difficult time and always, and provides a structure infused with holiness to my days. I am deeply grateful to Fr. Richard and his team for the work they have done to make both the offices and the streamed noon Masses available to all of us.

Jonathan Scolare

Right before we sign off and go about the rest of our days, we wave to each other and wish each well. Each time I see those smiles and waves I am reminded that we are in this together, we are here to lift each other up, and though we are unable to worship Mass together, we are still in communion.

Paul McKee

Morning & Evening Prayer via Zoom has been a wonderful opportunity to participate in the daily prayer rhythm our prayer book provides. Actually seeing & hearing the others online is a welcome benefit as well in this time of isolation. Thank you Fr. Wall for continuing this valuable ministry.

Janet Wamsley:

Since I've been coming to St. Paul's, I've been a regular attendee at daily Mass and the daily office, so it's good to see the prayers of the parish continue, in spite of the circumstances. It's nice to see people, and to know they're there, and it's a blessing to have something to give structure to my days. I'm very thankful for the behind the scenes work that made it technologically possible, and I appreciate Fr. Richard's willingness to make himself available.

Jennifer Johnston

I have found that Morning and Evening Prayer help me to structure my day, and I marvel that I can access them via Zoom. What a God send!

Julian Waller

I've found both the Zoom Evening Prayer and the wonderfully reviving livestreams of mass on Facebook to be absolutely necessary given the long dark that we've had through this pandemic isolation. I am very thankful to Father Wall and all others who put in so much effort to make these happen, and they just make me more eager to return to communal worship when it's once more possible.

Ed Loucks

It has been wonderful to see so many people participating in Evening Prayer via zoom. For a lot of people, this is more convenient than fighting traffic, etc to be at church for Morning or Evening Prayer. This may be a way to continue the Daily Offices in the future. An additional benefit is that it enabled some new people to participate in our On Matters of the Soul group zoom gather that followed Evening Prayer.

Nevin Brown

I am so glad that St Paul's has continued on-line its regular daily services. Evening Prayer (and when available Choral Evensong) is the service that first brought me to the Episcopal Church eons ago. Evening Prayer has helped anchor me spiritually during this strange time in all our lives, and I feel I have been blessed to be able to participate with friends from St Paul's in this evening offering of prayer and thanksgiving.

Linda Wilkinson

I was surprised to feel so comfortable to see the faces of my fellow parishioners. This has restored the daily rhythm of communal prayer that I was missing from not being able to meet for morning prayer in the chapel.

Arnitta Coley

I'm used to a Rule of Life and was saying the Offices everyday, before the "new normal" was instituted. If I was not able to be at St. Paul's, I either said the Offices from my BCP or used

Mission St. Clare on-line. I listened because I miss our Community. I feel isolated. I was delighted when we started the Virtual Services, even though I have struggled with Zoom and Facebook, occasionally.

I had a medical appointment this morning and was on a bus, looking down at my smartphone. I was wrapped up in a scarf - cold/windy AND my facemasks were due this evening. I didn't want to miss the community spoken office.

Jenny Brake

The Daily Offices on Zoom bring us together as a community and provide us with a sense of unity as we live through this pandemic with our church closed and real time gathering taboo. Every day 20 to 35 parishioners join in, which I think speaks to people's need to be with God and each other. Zoom allows parishioners to participate whether they live in the neighborhood or in suburbs outside of Washington many miles away.

It is wonderful that we can gather together through Zoom to pray for others, give thanks for our blessings and love the Lord. May we all stay safe.

Lindsay Raffetto

Our family has found Evening Prayer via Zoom to be a much-needed bright spot during these challenging

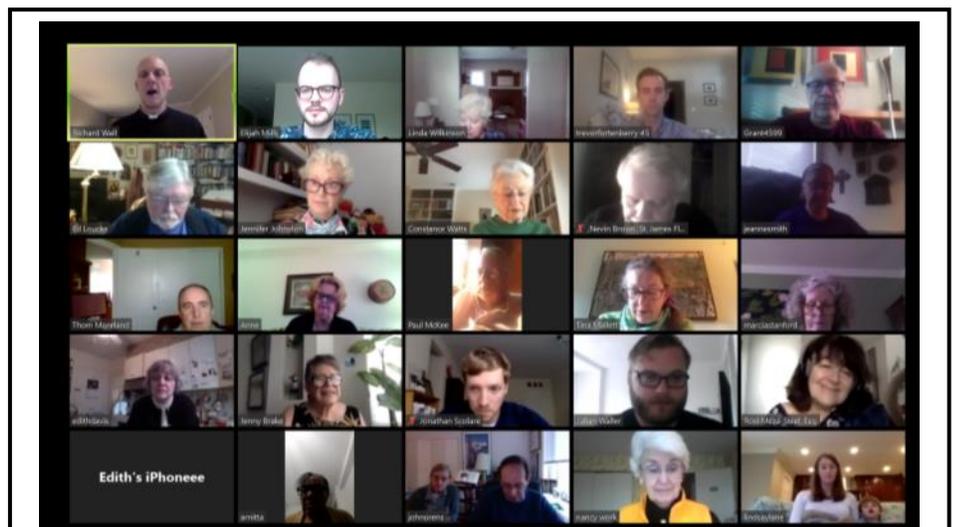
times. Our son Thomas loves getting to do 'church' every day, and we all look forward to the nightly opportunity to feel connected to our St. Paul's friends and to spend a half an hour in reflective prayer. It's been a comforting reminder that, at a time when everything else in our daily lives seems to have been turned upside down, God's love is constant and reliable.

Nancy Work

I participate in 6:00PM Evening Prayer daily which makes me feel we are gathering just as the early Christians did, meeting in our homes, reading from BCP. We greet one another with our "Hello's" and "Goodbye's" as we sign on and off, but otherwise we do not chat & visit. Even so, I feel in fellowship seeing and hearing everyone's voices and are reminded as we close with St Chrysostom's prayer "...when two or three are gathered together in his Name thou wilt be in the midst of them..."

Elijah Mills

I have never in my life prayed with such a defined schedule and rhythm as I am now with our "Daily Triptych." I first, eagerly, agreed to help out with the Zoom Offices thinking this would be a temporary, small affair, like serving at the Office has been in my experience at St. Paul's



Evening Prayer, April 14, 2020

prior to COVID-19. I did not realize, or imagine, at the onset of our triptych the scope our social distancing would take - and yet, participating in the Zoom Offices has given my life in this time of pandemic and quarantine a rhythm, grounding, and stability that I realize now I lacked before. I am encouraged by how many of our parish community participate and I am eager to see how this experience will shape our collective ministries in the future, once this too has passed.

Connie Watts

So very thankful for the extraordinary efforts being made to keep us all connected during this unique Holy season. The Lord is Risen, Alleluia!

Rachel Harber

In this time and space when we can't gather together for Sunday worship, I have been struck with a deep awareness of longing. In the absence we are made even more aware of how much our practices mean to us, and I am discovering just how much the feeling of pulling up to church on Sundays and seeing the faces of the community impacts my week. But I am also discovering new forms of "pulling up to church". Gathering with my K Street family for daily zoom prayer has become the part of my day and week that feeds my soul and brings forth joy in my heart.

Rosi Meza-Steel

Joining my fellow parishioners as one in prayer and supplication in these most troubled times is a lifeline. I was surprised and moved deeply the other day by my sudden vision of Jesus appearing on the waters and bidding Peter come. But it was all of us—not Peter alone—who stepped overboard to meet the Master and kept from sinking as our eyes were fixed on Him.

Christopher White

Losing the weekly rhythm of work, hobby, and worship, and the physical separation of office, home, and church, offers me an opportunity

and a danger: I can weave work into a whole, humane life of work and prayer, or I can let work and procrastination consume me. Most days it's a little of both. But in the steady reminder of daily morning prayer, God's grace nudges me towards the former.

Eddie Davis

Daily Office on Zoom has been a great blessing for me on several counts. First, what a joy to see so many dear St Paul's people again (and every day!); second, it saved my Lent (and even provided probably the most disciplined Lent of my life!); and third, this is just the kind of observant Eastertide I've always wanted. In fact, this "virtual monasticism" (Fr. Richard's term - thank you, Fr!) is exactly what I have needed for a long time, and this 'commuter' would love to see it continue indefinitely!

Trevor Fortenberry

Praying the Daily Office with St Paul's has been an incredible blessing in my life, as I'm sure it has in the lives of many others. Even when I'm having a bad day or question whether I really feel like logging on, it brings me so much joy to see everyone's faces and hear their voices, and I feel spiritually refresh and enriched every single time. St Paul's is an extremely special community, and it means so much to me to be part of that com-

munity even when in lockdown hundreds of miles away.

Hannah Proctor

After weeks of quarantine, stuck at home, missing the routine and liturgical rhythm of time spent in communal, physical worship spaces, I've come to treasure a new daily habit: corporate prayer via Zoom. Every morning, my daughters and I join our voices and videoed faces with others from SPKS, praying the daily office, meditating on our Lord Jesus Christ. We hear the chiming of clocks and chattering of children; we see the messy rooms and curated art on walls. These holy moments have taught me patience and brought me joy in a way I couldn't have imagined. This is one habit I hope will become so ingrained that I keep praying the daily office even after we can all meet again in person.

Tina Mallett

I love seeing the children! And the smiling faces of fellow parishioners. I feel connected to those I see, as if I were with them in their homes.

I like the structure that our regular times of worship give to the day and am very grateful to Fr. Richard and his able assistants for making the Daily Triptych possible.



The Daily Triptych
9 AM - Morning Prayer via Zoom
12 Noon - Mass via Livestream
6PM - Evening Prayer via Zoom

Visit saintpaulskstreet.org for more details.



Our Cherry Tree: An Easter Resurrection Story

Deb Loucks
Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020

This year, our 30+ year-old Kwanzan cherry tree was part of my journey through Lent+Maundy Thursday+Good Friday+Holy Saturday to Easter while sheltering in place at home. Sunday morning worship has consisted of live-streamed services from the Washington National Cathedral. Today's Easter sermon was given by The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry (Presiding Bishop of the U.S. Episcopal Church). The title was "It's Easter Anyway!" His opening lines were: "It's Easter Sunday. It doesn't look like it. It doesn't smell like it. It doesn't really feel like it. But it's Easter anyway."

A couple of winters back, a pipe broke beneath our neighbor's driveway, and icy cold water began to seep and collect underground. This lasted about three months, almost drowning our cherry tree's roots. That spring, there were fewer blossoms and leaves on scraggly branches and, later on, some type of fungus developed on the tree. Several branches died and fell after gusts of wind. Following the advice of a nursery, the tree was fertilized, and dead or fungus-infested branches were removed. That fall, leaves turned and dropped off earlier than usual.

The same cycle was repeated the following year: that spring, yet again our cherry tree had sparser blossoms and dead branches, and leaves turned early and fell, revealing our poor cherry tree's fragile, barky skeleton. Another nursery consultation resulted in pounding fertilizer stakes into the ground late fall last year and repeating the pounding of the stakes again early spring this year. I would look out every day and in the middle of Lent, be-

gan to see early signs of promising blossoms appearing on the branches.

And now, in the midst of the worst pandemic in over 100 years (COVID19), our cherry tree—still bearing its near-drowning scars of dead branches—has burst into new life with abundant blossoms, just in time for Easter! The below photo shows a very much alive cherry tree full of blossoms that look like pink carnations, with the hope of more new leaves and branches this year. Thanks be to God!

Early spring is God's way of beginning once again the crescendo of new life on into summer. And I think that our cherry tree is more open to change and resurrection than I am. In spite of too much water at its roots, loss of limbs, and premature loss of leaves, the tree has gone through winter to early spring changing from a

barky skeleton to being loaded with clusters of plump pink carnation-like blossoms. This new life is the result of careful tending, nourishment, rain, and sunlight.

These COVID19 days call for a new way of being, nourishing relationships, gently tending to ourselves and those around us, and letting go of toxic old habits. Perhaps we, too, can dare to be open to the possibility of "resurrection power" and new life from God's SonLight, and realize that in the midst of this surreal pandemic, it's Easter anyway, and we are being changed into a new way of being.



For now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come.

(Song of Solomon, 2:11-12a; NRSV)

Finished but Only Just Begun

John Orens
Wednesday, April 8, 2020
Holy Week Meditation via Zoom

This is a story that begins with Wilma. I met Wilma when my wife, Elizabeth, was pursuing a doctorate in religion and literature at Drew University. Wilma was an aspiring political scientist from the Netherlands. She was bright, cheerful, and a confirmed non-believer who had no interest in theology whatsoever. But because the university had very little housing for single graduate students, Wilma was assigned a room in the seminary dormitory. Drew is a Methodist school and Methodists, as some of you know, do not share our Anglican reserve. They are perpetually ebullient and eager to share their heartwarming faith. Poor Wilma, you might think. Fortunately, Wilma was a goodnatured and tolerant young woman, so she got along famously with her neighbors. But she did find their faith perplexing, and one evening she voiced her doubts with a question that is as troubling as it is inescapable: “How can you say that Jesus saved the world, when the world is just as bad as it has ever been? What did the death of Jesus accomplish?”

A century-and-a-half ago, as he was defending his conversion to the Roman Catholic church, John Henry Newman confessed that to consider the tragic spectacle of human history and the inevitable anguish of human life “inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery which is absolutely beyond human solution.” And in the 150 years that have passed since then, the mystery has only deepened. Its challenge was perhaps put most powerfully in “the Parable of the Old Man and the Young,” a poem Wilfred Owen wrote in the closing days of the First World War, shortly before he himself would die on the battlefield.

*So Abram rose and clave the wood
and went
And took the fire with him, and a
knife.
And as they sojourned both of them
together
Isaac the first born spake and said, My
Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron
But where the lamb for this burnt of-
fering?
Then Abram bound the youth with
belts and straps,
And buidled parapets and trenches
there,
And stretchèd forth the knife to slay
his son.
When lo! an angel called him out of
heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of pride instead.*

*But the old man would not so, but
slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by
one.*

And there, at the center of the slaughter, hangs a man on a cross, torn by the contending furies of our sinful state; a figure whose desolation embodies every innocence betrayed and every hope despoiled.

It was on the mount of Transfiguration that God had clothed Jesus in dazzling brightness and said, “This is my beloved son, listen to him.” And now, on a dung heap outside Jerusalem, Jesus speaks to us, and from the cross utters a word that Saint John records as *tetelestai*, a Greek word for which there is no adequate English equivalent. It does not mean, “It’s all over. I’m finished.” Rather, it means something like, “It’s perfect. I’ve reached the finish line. I’ve been made whole.” It is the word a painter

might say after putting the final brushstroke on a masterpiece. And with this astonishing pronouncement, Jesus invites us to make his wholeness our own, to take up our own cross and follow him. But what sort of wholeness can this be? How can we who are torn on the crosses of our own lives be made whole by taking up his?

Of all the paradoxes of the Christian faith, this is surely the most perplexing and one that, unlike the Trinity or the Incarnation, the Church has never been able to define. It confronts us with nothing less than a theophany, the unbounded presence of the living God. And it is into this boundless reality that we were baptized, our ending—our perfection—joined to our beginning, and our beginning joined to his ending. You and I have been plunged into a sacred spiral, the double helix of new life, the double helix of atonement, at-onement with God. No theory can do justice to this mystery about which theologians continue to argue. All that I can do is offer three halting glimpses of atonement that may help us enter more deeply into its promise, glimpses that I would call personal, communal, and cosmic.

Let us begin with our selves, with our own souls. There is a saying in the Talmud that before every human being there marches an army of angels shouting, “Make way for the image of God!” The words are stirring, but what does it mean to be made in the image of God? Obviously we are not omnipresent nor, despite our hubris, are we omniscient or omnipotent. Indeed, it is in aspiring to these things that we fall into sin. It is not because we cannot achieve them that we sin nor is it because it is wrong to want to be like God. The sin is that our desire to be like God utterly misses who God is.

Ever since that fateful day in the garden, we have confused divinity with autonomy. We have struggled to be self-contained and self-sufficient, worshipping a god of self-fulfillment and self-advancement, a god blind to the world's pain and so self-enclosed that he is not even aware of it, all the while the one true God is hanging on a cross.

God is not autonomy; God is love. And love is self-abandonment for the sake of the beloved. It is the love that dances in the holy Trinity. It is the overflowing love that made us so that we might rejoice in love. The image of God is the image of love. The image of God, the image of perfect humanity, is Jesus of Nazareth, and there is no other way to God or to our deepest self than through him and his sacrifice. For the heart of divinity and humanity lies precisely in his loving, even joyful, surrender of self to God and to us, his erring brothers and sisters. When Pilate presented Jesus to the crowd and said, "Behold the man," he might just as well have said, "Behold Man! Make way for the image of God!"

Tetelestai. Here on the cross our life is made whole, here our humanity is made complete, for it is on the cross that God in man shattered the idol of autonomy and, through love alone, tore down the walls of our self-imposed captivity. As the old hymn puts it:

*Fulfilled is all the David told
In true prophetic song of old.
Amidst the nations, God saith he
Hath reigned and triumphed from the tree.*

And so shall we if we will but take up our cross and follow him. God does not ask that we torture ourselves or, even less, that we despise ourselves. All that God asks is that we surrender ourselves to him so that he might fill us with love; surrender our-

selves to him so that we might discover the love that we were created to be. Self-surrender, of course, leaves us vulnerable. But without vulnerability there can be no intimacy, and without intimacy we can have neither joy nor peace. You are never poorer than when you are counting your pennies, never more fearful of death than when you are checking your pulse, and never more anxious for the future than when, like Prufrock, you are measuring out your life with coffee spoons. But if you lose your life, if you give it up to the beloved for the sake of the beloved, you will gain it. And the life you gain you will never lose because it is no longer yours. It belongs to God, and he has offered it up for us all; not just for you and me, but for the whole human family.

Here we catch our second glimpse of the mystery of atonement, for the prison of autonomy that shuts us off from God also shuts us off from one another. Remember that, as the Bible tells the story, with the loss of Eden came the curse of enmity: enmity between men and women, between brothers and sisters, between the powerful and the powerless. The whole of the Old Testament is a chronicle of human brokenness and of God's insistent call to his wayward children to leave the bondage of isolation for the freedom of community in him. It is a costly summons because to enter into authentic relationship is to come out of the world of comfortable illusions and all too comfortable privileges. Before Abraham became the father of a great nation, he had to take the exile's road from his native Mesopotamia. Before his descendants, the children of Israel, could enter the land of promise, they had to leave the comforts of slavery in Egypt and wander in the wilderness. The divine summons carries with it a two-fold pain, the pain of loss and the pain of love, for the community God in-

tends for us, like the community that is the holy Trinity, is rooted in self-surrender. And its sacramental sign is the lifting up of the destitute and the powerless.

Abraham would have sacrificed his son and half the seed of Europe one by one had God commanded it. But God forbids it. It is not the sacrifice of the innocent other that God requires. Rather it is the sacrifice of our own selfish pride. It is the demand that underlies the Law that Moses received on Mount Sinai, and especially its two great commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "Love your neighbor as yourself." These commandments are inseparable. Indeed, in the prophets they are all but indistinguishable. And when God's people refused to heed the prophets and to hear God's call, the call became flesh in the life of a Galilean artisan who chose to share the lot of the poor and dispossessed. To them he preached good news, and to the brokenhearted he brought healing and consolation. He did this not as an anodyne, but as a sign of the coming age of community that was breaking into the world. And when the world again would not bear the pain that love demands, God bore the pain on the cross. There Christ, who in his purity had embraced the impure, became himself ritually impure, and carrying that impurity into the heart of God, he tore down the walls of our self-imposed isolation. *Tetelestai.* And from the cross, Jesus calls us into ever deeper communion so that we, in turn, may go out and gather others in. This is what it means to be church, *ekklesia*, the assembly of those called out to call the world in. Our task is not to remake the lost into our own image. Rather, God has summoned us to see Christ in them, so that they might see him in themselves and in us as we sit together at the banquet table of the

Separated as we are from one another in this strangest of Eastertides, it sometimes seems as if we have stumbled on some darkling plain. Yet even in darkness a garden is growing. Let us never lose sight of it. Let us be careful to tend it in our souls, in our church, and in our world, so that when it comes to full blossom we may rejoice with all the saints to behold its appearing.

Kingdom of God to which we and the cosmos itself have been invited.

It is here that we glimpse the third and most elusive mystery of atonement. Gazing at the world we cannot help but be struck by the contrast between its beauty and order on the one hand, and its pain and suffering on the other. It is as if there were a great rift running through the universe and through the heart of every living thing, including ourselves. Why this should be is something we cannot entirely understand. The story in Genesis places the blame squarely on our shoulders; it was our sin that brought misery and death into the world. This, of course, is a myth. But it points to an inescapable truth. It is we who have turned the world's pain into sin, for it is we who turned blind suffering into willful cruelty. God gave the world into our care, and we have used our dominion to plunder it as if it were an enemy city that we had conquered and could now claim as our own. But "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell within."

Creation is gift just as our lives are a gift. This is the truth that underlay the Old Testament sacrificial system. It was God who received the first fruits of the harvest, not the farmer, not the landlord, not even the king. And although the blood of animals was splattered on the temple altar, neither the priests nor the people consumed it, for the Law taught that life was in the blood, and life belonged to God alone. But as the prophets came to see, even these covenant offerings did not reflect God's perfect will.

"Do you think that I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" God asked the psalmist. "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving (in Greek, *eucharistia*) and make good your vows to the most high." The day was coming, God told Isaiah, when "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. . . . They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

That day has now dawned, for on God's holy mountain—Mount Calvary—God has shed his own blood. And in taking the pain of the world into himself, by surrendering his life, the lamb of God has knit together his sundered creation. There on the cross we glimpse its perfection. *Tetelestai*. It was finished, and behold, it was very good. And just as God rested on the seventh day from all he had done, so Jesus rests on this holy Sabbath. But God's rest is not sleep; it is love. It was on the Sabbath that Jesus healed the man with a withered arm, and on the Sabbath that he told the cripple at the pool of Siloam to take up his mat and walk. So it is that on this Sabbath Christ descends among the dead, bringing deliverance to those in prison, lifting them out of the hell of sin and despair.

This is what the Church knows as "the harrowing of hell." Some of us have icons that depict the dramatic moment when Christ grasps Adam and Eve by their wrists, leading them

out of the darkness as a great multitude of souls follow in their wake. Will anyone be excluded? Jack Nicholls, the retired Bishop of Sheffield, tells the story of a sixth-form schoolgirl whom he asked where Jesus was between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. She pondered the question and replied, "I think he was in deepest hell looking for his friend Judas." This is the love that raised Jesus from the dead, and it is this same selfless love that seeks us, leading us out of the shadows where we have hidden into God's glorious light, there to finish our baptismal journey and to enter into our Sabbath rest. And that rest is to participate in Christ's loving work of knitting together our broken lives, our broken communities, and our broken world.

It is finished, but it is not over. Nor, in one sense, can it ever be. Even on the day when Christ is all in all, the joyful self-surrender that is the holy Trinity will still be calling us into deeper communion with ourselves, with one another, with the whole creation, and with God. This, I think, is at least part of the answer to Wilma's question. Why we are still here—why the world still awaits its promised consummation—we do not know. What we do know is that to us has been given a special grace; the grace of lives growing into the love that Christ perfected on the cross. The great American philosopher, William James, once asked, "What has been concluded, that we should conclude with regard to it?" Or to put it another way, of what can we say *tetelestai*? And the answer is everything and nothing, for what God

has finished is forever new.

In his commentary on the Song of Songs, the fourth-century theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, likened God to the spring in the Garden of Eden that watered the face of the earth.

“As you came near the spring,” he wrote, “you would marvel, seeing that the water was endless, as it constantly gushed up and poured forth. Yet you could never say that you had seen all the water. How could you see what was still hidden in the bosom of the earth? Hence no matter how long you might stay at the spring, you would always be beginning to see the water. For the water never stops flowing, and it is always beginning to bubble up again. It is the same,” Gregory observed, “with one who fixes his gaze on the infinite beauty of God. It is constantly being discovered anew, and it is always seen as something new and strange in comparison with what the mind has already understood. And as God continues to reveal Himself, man continues to wonder; and he never exhausts his desire to see more, since what he is waiting for is always more magnificent, more divine, than all that he has already seen.” This is the perfection of God. *Tetelestai*. It is indeed finished but it has only just begun, hard though it may be to discern.

Separated as we are from one another in this strangest of Easter-tides, it sometimes seems as if we have stumbled on some darkling plain. Yet even in darkness a garden is growing. Let us never lose sight of it. Let us be careful to tend it in our souls, in our church, and in our world, so that when it comes to full blossom we may rejoice with all the saints to behold its appearing.



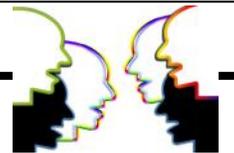
Triduum 2020: Creating a Spiritual Nave in Our Hearts

Steven Chlapecka, Videographer



On Matters of the Soul via Zoom

Ed Loucks, Convener



“May you live in interesting times,” said the ancient Chinese warlord as he cursed his rival. That curse has come down to us today as the worst thing you could wish on a person you wanted to harm deeply. Are we not living in interesting times right now?

Our small group just finished our study of Philip Yancey’s book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*. We finished it just in time to find ourselves enveloped in a staggering pandemic, that has made it impossible for us to meet face-to-face—something which we, as a “fellowship and spiritual growth” group depend on. We are convinced as a small body that spiritual growth occurs most effectively in community—not in isolation. Thanks to Fr. Richard, we have been able to continue working together with the help of ZOOM. We miss the hugs.

Yancey’s final chapters talk about the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and His final commands to those He left behind. He was telling us when He said, “It is finished!” that He has done what He came to earth to do. Now, it is up to us to carry on the work. Yancey refers us to St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (3:8-10):

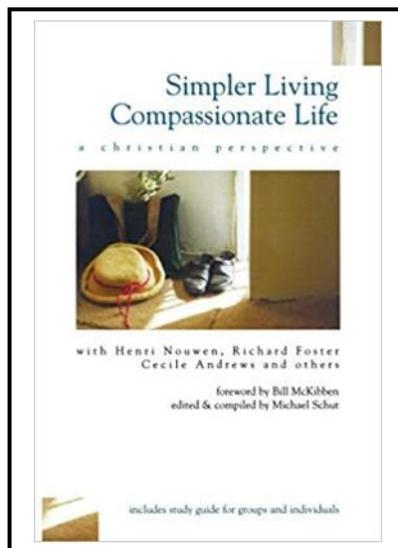
Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

“Jesus played His part and then left.” Yancey writes. “Now it is up to us.”

What did Jesus say to His follow-

ers at the ascension moment? Go into the world and (1) preach the Gospel, (2) making disciples, (3) teach them to obey all the commandments I have given you. What does “making disciples” mean? It means show people how to be followers of Jesus—not the dictates of the culture around us. What commandments of Jesus are we, his disciples, to be taught? One can begin with the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). One of my favorite summaries of what it is like to be a disciple of Jesus is found in the parable of the sheep and the goats, in Matthew 25:31-46. We are told that when we do good deeds to those in need, it is as if we had done them to Jesus, and our reward is to join Him in His Kingdom. If we fail to show love and compassion to those in need, we will be banished from His Kingdom.

Yancey has written another book entitled *Where Is God When It Hurts?* The answer, he tells us, is another question: “Where is the church when it hurts?” How well is the church doing on this one? Are we healing, loving, speaking truth to power? Or are we building megachurches, worshipping numbers, seeking political pow-



er, and giving our pastors private jets and limousines?

Our next study challenge is a book entitled *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective*, edited and compiled by Michael Schut, a collection of essays about simplifying our lives so we can find time and energy to practice discipleship. It contains essays by several of our favorite writers – Henry Nouwen, William Stringfellow, Wendell Berry, Gerald May, Frederic Buechner, Richard Foster and many others.

We will meditate on the following traditional Celtic prayer which serves as a book mark for our study volume:

*Lord, help me now to unclutter my life,
to organize myself in the direction of simplicity.*

*Lord, teach me to listen to my heart;
teach me to welcome change, instead of fearing it.*

*Lord, I give You these stirrings inside me,
I give you my discontent,
I give you my restlessness,
I give you my doubt,
I give you my despair,
I give you all the longings I hold inside.*

*Help me to listen to these signs of change, of growth;
to listen seriously and follow where they lead through the breathtaking empty space of an open door.
Amen.*



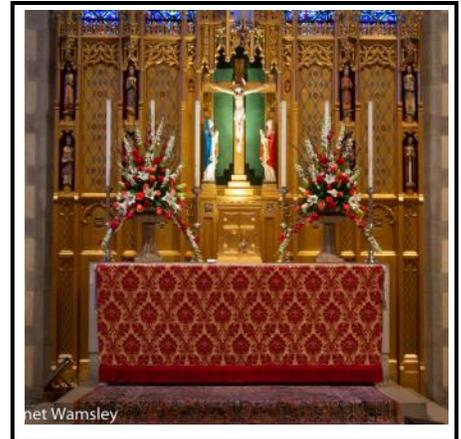
MAY/ JUNE ON K STREET

Upcoming Feast Days



UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS AT ST. PAUL'S PARISH

May	June
1 Laura Hanson Butch Bradburn	3 Rex Granum
2 Larry Cook Thomas Moreland	7 Rhoda Geasland Jane Poweleit
3 Sarah Buzby Andrew de Michaelis	8 Remington Gregg Dominic Murton
7 Ted Pewett John Schnorrenberg Janet Wamsley	11 Charles Barrientos
9 Shaun Amos	12 Cathy Downes
10 James Spaulding	14 Vita Pierzchala Rebecca Hungerford
12 Robert Eikel Sean Byrd Laura Fernandez	15 Phyllis Altrogge
14 Barry Johnson	20 John Herrmann
16 Ron Grant Megan Sokolowski	22 Octavia Johnson Allen Payne Randy Summerfield
18 Edward Britton Jeremiah Cassidy	23 Jack Ramsay Donald Reinecker
19 Sophia Haughton	24 Allison Winter Karen Wires
23 Thomas Barrientos	25 Scott Spaulding
24 Kahn Branch	26 June Barnes Jeffrey Gasta
25 Arnitta Coley Lawrence Campbell	29 Charlene Mui James Gasser
26 Robert Bear	30 Laurel Malson
28 Gwyneth Zakaib	
30 J. Michael Cutshaw	



**Ascension of our Lord
Thursday, May 21, 2020**

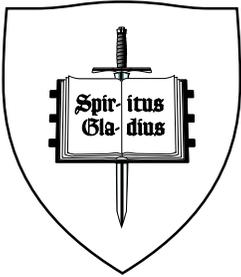
**The Day of Pentecost, Whitsunday
Sunday, May 31, 2020**

**The Feast of the Most Holy and
Undivided Trinity
Sunday, June 7, 2020**

**The Solemnity of Corpus Christi
Sunday, June 14, 2020**

**The Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul
Sunday, June 28, 2020**

HaPpY
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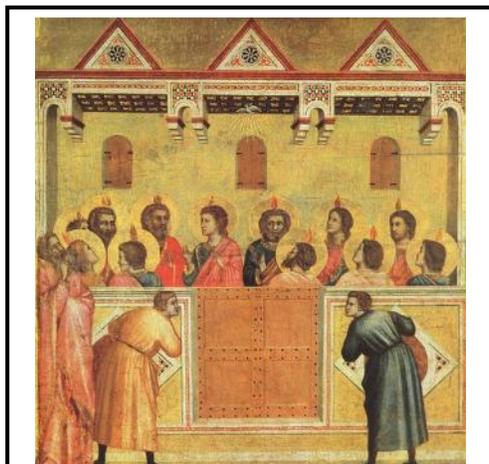
Ascension: Thursday, May 21

Pentecost: Sunday, May 31

Trinity Sunday: June 7

Corpus Christi: Sunday, June 14

Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul: Sunday, June 28



Giotto di Bondone, circa 1320-25