

The Good News

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September 30, 2008

Morning Prayer

As an undergraduate, I attended an Anglican university in Canada where The Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer were held in an historic chapel. The atmosphere was similar to Oxford, England with students in academic gowns sitting quietly across from one another. There was a lack of ritual and pomp in these simple services which were often sung. They provided a time for reflection and elicited prayerfulness from Monday through Friday.

I graduated from college in 1971, and it was not until I attended seminary in 1977 that The Daily Offices were a regular part of my life. It was great to get back in the groove again.

At seminary we were reminded that "All Sundays of the year are feasts of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*The Book of Common Prayer*, page 16) and that "The Holy Eucharist [is] the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord's Day" (BCP, page 13). Yet, Morning Prayer on two Sundays of the month was a regular occasion in my upbringing in the Episcopal Church. That experience was missing from my life for the twenty-three years I did not live in Massachusetts. It wasn't until I returned in 1992 that I experienced again a church that did not have Holy Eucharist every Sunday. I find Morning Prayer to be rewarding on some Sunday mornings even though I have been scolded, reprimanded and hung out to dry by my peers for this. In the spirit of Anglicanism, I continue to feel the value of The Daily Offices but realize that few, if any, would attend these weekday services and see the importance of Morning Prayer on Sundays as a way to collect our lives from the busyness of the world.

However, there are occasions when conducting Morning Prayer on Sundays is inappropriate. For example, on Sundays when there is Baptism, or during the Easter Season when the collects and lessons lead up to the celebration of the Eucharist.

Last spring I read *The Parson's Handbook* by Percy Dearmer and learned what I believe to be a more proper observance of Morning Prayer on Sundays. He suggests the following:

First of all when we arrive for the service, the tone should be more reflective and contemplative in nature. Unlike the celebration of Holy Eucharist, Morning Prayer does not lend itself to a triumphal entry with processional hymns, crucifer and choir. Instead the service begins with the prelude, tolling of the bells and a meditative hymn sung by the choir in place. This leads up to the opening sentences and confession, concluding with the *Venite* sung in a simple chant. Likewise the Psalm is to be led by the choir in chant, followed by lessons and canticle. The choral anthem is given before the third lesson, followed by sermon, creed, and prayers. The offertory hymn is then sung by the congregation towards the end of the service, while the collection is being taken up, and serves as our doxology. It is in the act of giving and not the elevation of our donation that God is honored. The service concludes with announcements ending with A Prayer of St. Chrysostom and Dismissal.

We tried this approach to Morning Prayer on Sunday, September 28 at 10:00 a.m. and will conduct our next Morning Prayer service on October 19, on the occasion of a special music program with Peter Lea Cox. Please feel free to give me any input on this subject, as we are trying to make worship a deeper and richer experience for all the people of St. Mary's.

—Peter Chase

Reflections on Padre Julio's Visit

Padre Julio Rivera arrived on September 1 from our sister parish in El Salvador with a big smile and a bear hug. At first our conversational skills relied heavily on body language, and we communicated like two mimes. Then it occurred to me that my favorite Mexican restaurant in Newton Centre could provide us with the perfect communication venue. The menu was in Spanish, and the waiter could translate our conversation between courses. The waiter graciously translated that Padre Julio was to spend the next 17 days learning, teaching, resting and sharing.

It is said that the best way to learn a language is to relax and have fun with it. The next two weeks with Padre Julio felt like an intense Spanish immersion class as I began to learn a new vocabulary.

The next morning we went to San Lucas in Chelsea to learn about Hispanic ministry in the diocese and attended Morning Prayer at 8:00 a.m. with Padre Edgardo from Columbia. During the service a young woman in tears walked in and sat towards the back of the sanctuary. She was penniless and lost, alone without friends in a country she couldn't understand. It turned out she was from El Salvador, and her eyes lit up as Padre Julio helped her and prayed with her for comfort, guidance, and courage to meet the days ahead. She left the church much stronger than when she had arrived. I thought my frustration over not being able to communicate in Spanish was insignificant in comparison to her problems. I was also reminded of the powerful voice of prayer for those who have faith.

The following day we went to the Salvation Army's *Miracle Kitchen* in Framingham, where Julio met a lady from Central America who had come to be fed a meal prepared by members of our parish. While there we were interviewed by Jorge Quiroga for the 11:00 p.m. news. Jorge's father was an Episcopal priest from Columbia who served parishes in New York City. His questions and our answers were short and to the point. Question: "Why are these people here?" Answer: "They are here because they need food." Question: "What would happen if this place was closed?" Answer: "They would go to bed hungry." Question: "So you think it is important to keep this place open?" Answer: "Yeah!"

The next morning, The Reverend Mark McKone-Sweat, assistant rector at St. Paul's in Natick, invited Julio for two days on the Cape before being their guest preacher. On Monday we went to Santa Anna in Lowell and met with Padre Ramon from Cuba, who told us about immigration ministries in Lowell, Lawrence and Lynn.

A highlight of Padre Julio's trip came during three refreshing days spent in Vermont dining on blueberry pancakes and maple syrup, fresh corn on the cob and other New England treats. During mealtime I discovered that Julio's sister lives and works in Maryland. They were both orphaned during the civil war when their village was bombed. Julio was seven years old at the time and ended up in a Catholic orphanage sponsored by Cardinal Oscar Romero (who later became an Archbishop and was assassinated during a mass because he had become an advocate for the oppressed.) At the age of eight, Julio dedicated himself to God and a future ministry of peace and reconciliation. He was ordained a Roman Catholic priest and quickly rose to the top of the diocesan hierarchy, becoming the Archbishop's chancellor.

A young and charismatic figure in the Roman Catholic diocese, Padre Julio's unexpected conversion to Anglicanism was a shock. He studied at an Anglican seminary in Mexico and returned to a labor of love in some of the poorest parishes in El Salvador. He makes \$300 a month as a vicar of Santa Maria Virgen, which has become the largest parish in the diocese since his arrival. There are only five priests in the entire diocese, but the good news is that five members of Santa Maria Virgen are university students who have expressed an interest in attending seminary and following in Padre Julio's footsteps. Santa Maria Virgen has just completed building a new church. I have been invited to attend the

given through the generosity of one of our members. Padre Julio said he “wouldn’t trade Christ’s ministry in El Salvador for the world.”

On the way back to Saint Mary’s, we met with clergy from Vermont who had been to El Salvador on earlier mission trips. That evening we had a reunion of our own mission team including those members from St. Paul’s in Natick to El Salvador at a dinner hosted by Tim and Mary Green. The following day, Padre Julio preached and taught an Adult Forum at St. Mary’s and that evening nearly 50 people enjoyed Salvadorean cuisine in the Parish Hall.

On Monday, Padre Julio met with the faculty and students at the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, where he celebrated the Eucharist for the entire student body. Finally, before leaving he met with diocesan clergy and toured a Spanish immersion preschool in Weston and Epiphany School in Dorchester.

This was a rewarding experience for him and one that I will never forget. I not only learned some new words in Spanish but also was reminded of the importance of prayer. Padre Julio joined me during three pastoral visits to members of our congregation and prayed for their recovery. And I know he continues to be a man of prayer, keeping us in his daily petitions to God for health and strength.

—Peter Chase

Upcoming Events

Service of Sung Morning Prayer with Peter Lea-Cox as Guest Organist and Conductor, Sunday, October 19 at 10:00 a.m.

St. Mary’s will again welcome Peter Lea-Cox, English organist, composer and conductor. He will lead the St. Mary’s Choir and congregation in a Service of Sung Morning Prayer featuring music of Ralph Vaughan Williams. Lea-Cox has visited St. Mary’s on three other occasions in recent years to lead Evensong, conduct a Bach cantata, and celebrate Palm Sunday with music by Buxtehude. Currently he directs the Lecosaldi Ensemble of London, a group of professional singers and instrumentalists. The Ensemble specializes in 18th-century music, but also performs works from all musical periods.

Foods’n Fancies Annual Bazaar, Saturday November 22 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall

This is the only major fundraiser for The Women of St. Mary’s to fund its outreach initiatives. Please begin searching your attics and closets for items to donate for sale at this unique event.

Transforming Congregational Culture

Editor: This message is adapted from Peter’s September 21st sermon.

The Vestry is reading a book called *Transforming Congregational Culture*, and the author spoke to the clergy of the diocese last Tuesday morning. He said that much of the biblical story is an attempt to transform the prevailing culture by an understanding of how God would have us operate.

Let’s take the parable of Matthew 2:1-16 as an example. This parable goes against the principles of fairness and justice established by society. The laborers hired at the end of the day received the same wages as those who had been hired at the beginning and worked longer. This is simply unjust, based on a system that says the amount of work done is equal to the reward given. This is not your Henry Ford’s “An honest day’s work for an honest day’s wage.” There is no fairness in this reading, but there is a lot of mercy.

I was once the youth minister in a large parish in California where one of the highlights was the annual ski retreat at Squaw Valley. There was much planning and fundraising by the youth in preparation for this event with bake sales and car washes to lower the cost of paying for the trip. And every year there

would be a bunch of last minute “tag alongs.” These were high schoolers who would board the bus and enjoy three days of skiing, who rarely participated or contributed to the work of the youth group.

Inevitably, I would receive a lecture from one of the youth group leaders: “This is totally unfair. Why should they get to join us? They haven’t done the work we have. This is no way to run a church. What you are doing is alienating all the contributors and what you will end up with is a church full of people who don’t do anything.” My answer was to remind them that our congregational culture did not mirror that of the business world and was not based on a system of meritocracy. We cannot work our way into the Kingdom of God, and we depend on God’s mercy upon us. As one commentator of this parable said there is an annoying quality to the story. It suggest that if you go to church—you go to heaven, and if you don’t go to church—you still get to go to heaven. You come every Sunday or you just show up this morning. You still get a free BBQ.

Yes, this is no way to run a church, but fortunately that’s the way Jesus runs it. According to the author Barbara Brown Taylor, “We may not always approve of God’s methods – but fortunately our approval is not required.” The church operates by the grace of God and that is precisely how the church can transform the prevailing culture we live in as a sign of God’s mercy.

A friend of mine from Georgia once explained how grace operates by telling me an old joke. A northern businessman traveled to Alabama for the first time. That morning he went into the local coffee shop and ordered two eggs, bacon, hash browns, toast and orange juice. When the order arrived, he noticed some grey mush looking stuff on the corner of his plate and asked the waitress, “What’s that?” “Them’s grits,” she said. “But I didn’t order them!” he retorted. With a big smile the waitress responded, “Sir, you don’t order grits; they just come!”

<p>The good news of the Bible is that we don’t order, or work for, or pay for the Grace; it just shows up is back to your lead in about welcoming, affirming, and full of mercy.</p>

One commentator on our parable, Jim Crawford, said, “If we are to understand this parable correctly, then we will see that the incredible payoff is simply in getting to work in the vineyard for Christ. When we serve Christ, then, we will not be jealous of the late comer, but will be thrilled when the newcomer finally arrives.” The reward itself is being part of the community.

By the way, my explanation to the youth group was not in the least bit persuasive. A good explanation isn’t necessarily a good answer. So let us try to understand scripture as it is written. In the Bible it is important to distinguish the two key concepts of justice and mercy. The Hebrew word for justice is rooted in the concept of measurement. Justice is weighed out and calculated. That is why we have the scales of justice. The Hebrew word for mercy is different; it is rooted in the word for womb and the concept of family love. It is similar to the word for generous and life affirming. Mercy is never calculated as justice is. Justice is dispensed, but mercy is freely given and is overflowing. Justice and mercy often go together hand in hand in the Bible, but there are passages in scripture where there seems to be no mercy in justice and also where there is no justice in mercy.

It is not just that the latecomers receive the same wage as those who have toiled all day. It is not justifiable, but it is merciful. And we can be grateful as our Psalm proclaims, “The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great kindness.” The good news of scripture is that by exemplifying Christ, we can begin to transform the world we live in.

The “Ask It” Basket:

Q: Why is the alms basin draped before presentation at the altar?

A: We drape the alms basin the same way we drape the vessels on the altar to signify that they are set