

# THE RECTOR'S CHRONICLE

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A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

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October, 2009

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

“What have we to expect? Anything. What have we to hope for? Everything. What have we to fear? Nothing.” Words from Edward Pusey, professor of Old Testament at Oxford and the guiding force behind the Oxford Movement in England in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Words which manifest a robust Christianity, even in a time when church practice was anything but robust. Words which also carry a timeless message.

What have we to expect? God does not usually tell us. We have the present moment, and with it the assurance that He is also Present in the moment along with whatever the world gives us. But of the future, God gives no guarantees. Normally, He tells us nothing – though there are the exceptions, as when He told Paul how much he would have to suffer for the sake of the Gospel after He appeared to him and blinded him on the Damascus Road. (This allowed Paul to fully commit himself before he was baptized.) But usually, we do not know what is coming. Dr Pusey suggests that we should expect *anything*, leaving the specifics up to God. This is to approach the future with openness, and with joyous anticipation, with the expectation that the *anything* comes from God and is within His providence. If we really trust God, we will be ready to welcome whatever comes. Our preferences for one thing over another will pale before our desire for God's will to be done. We will be ready for *anything* because it comes from our Lord.

Of course, most of us are not like this! There are obstacles to such joyful anticipation. The biggest one is fear. “What have we to fear, [Dr. Pusey asks]? Nothing.” We know this, but we do not always succeed in practicing it. We fear adversities and suffering. We fear that our lives may not turn out as we would wish. We fear poverty and dependence on others. We fear embarrassment and humiliation. We fear our own weakness and helplessness. We fear that we will fail – whether in our worldly endeavors or as Christians. We fear sin – even though we know that Christ has dealt with it on the Cross. I'm sure you can add to the list from your own experience.

Let's be honest: life is stressful. Fears and cares abound, whether personal or political or economic or emotional or spiritual. George MacDonald, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century novelist, can help us here:

The care that is filling your mind at this moment, or but waiting till you lay the book aside to leap upon you – that need which is no need, is a demon sucking at the spring of your life. “No; mine is a reasonable care – an unavoidable care, indeed.” Is it something you have to do this very moment? “No.” Then you are allowing it to usurp the place of something that is required of you this moment. “There is nothing required of me at this moment.” Nay, but there is – the greatest thing that can be required of man. “Pray, what is it?” Trust in the living God. ... “I do trust Him in spiritual matters.” Everything is an affair of the spirit.

What matters is what God gives us in the present moment. We cannot do anything in the past or future but only in the present. So what do we do much of the time? We rehash (and regret) the past and fret about the future. MacDonald points out that this is not a very Christian thing to do. The salutary alternative is to trust God and do the thing before us. Do what God gives us to do in the present moment. We may be sure that He is in the moment – whatever His providence may bring. While this may seem simplistic or worldly, it is actually profoundly spiritual – because it manifests a sacramental view of life. Doing what God gives us to do *is* spiritual.

What have we to hope for? Everything. This can be taken in two ways. First, God gives everything. He is not stingy. He gives more than we ask or imagine. He gives everything that we are capable of receiving. His gifts are limited not by His generosity (or lack thereof) but by our willingness and capacity to receive. How could it be otherwise for One who gives us Himself? He gives Himself by dwelling within our hearts in the Person of the Holy Spirit. He gives us Himself in the Body and Blood of His Son in the Holy Communion. He gives Himself to us in Christ's offering on the Cross, and the continuing offering of His blood as our great High Priest. He gives Himself to us in the intimacy of His love. What more could we ask?

He also gives us everything in the sense that He gives us everything earthly and spiritual which we need in this life. This is the working of providence. This means that while we expect *anything*, we receive *everything* – everything that is good for us, everything that will conform our hearts to His, everything that will prepare us to be His bride. In this sense, too, He gives us everything.

Dr Pusey, remember, lived in a time when the Church of England was not at its best, to put it mildly. Many thought of the church as simply a department of the state rather than a supernatural entity. Prayer Book disciplines (fasting, feast days, etc.) were widely ignored. Key doctrines of the faith were under attack. The Tractarians' efforts to reverse the decline were met largely with signs of failure. In short, Dr Pusey had every reason to be pessimistic about Christianity's prospects. And yet, he was not. What have we to expect? Anything. What have we to hope for? Everything. What have we to fear? Nothing.

### All Saints & All Souls

The Feast of All Saints (November 1<sup>st</sup>) falls on a Sunday this year, and we will observe it then. This feast celebrates in one observance the triumph of all the saints who, having finished their course on earth, now enjoy the Presence of God in heaven. This is a source of joy in many ways. For one, it reminds us that grace can and does triumph over sin and weakness. There is "success" in the lives of actual Christians. This is encouraging for us, since sometimes it seems like our efforts at being Christian do not bear much fruit. When we read the lives of the saints, we find that they too faced adversities, were often weak and sorely tried, and had their human foibles. St Benedict's monks once tried to poison him. Not a likely candidate to win friends and influence people – and yet he is now acknowledged as the Father of Western Monasticism.

The Feast of All Saints also reminds us that we are not alone. The Church extends beyond its present life on earth. We are united with the saints in heaven by our common union with Christ. This means we are also united in love: the saints undoubtedly love us, and we properly love them. This love is the basis upon which we ask them to pray for us, even as we ask others on earth to do so.

November 2<sup>nd</sup> is the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed – All Souls' Day. There will be a Requiem at the rectory at 6 p.m. Forms are enclosed for you to provide the names of the faithful who should be remembered at that Mass, as are envelopes should you wish to make a contribution. Please return them (by mail or on Sunday) by November 1<sup>st</sup>. Please also come and add your prayers at the Mass that day.

### October Events

There will be another of our monthly adult forums during coffee hour after the ten o'clock Mass on October 18<sup>th</sup>. The subject this month: a practical introduction to the church's healing ministry. This is, appropriately enough, the Feast of St Luke the Evangelist (a physician who is also the author of Acts). Also coming up on the last Sunday in October is the Feast of Christ the King. The parish ordo calendar shows it in November, but we will celebrate it on its traditional October date.

Movie Night at the Rectory will be back by popular demand. The date is not yet certain. We expect to gather on a Friday evening later in October or early November to continue with the *Barchester Chronicles*, an adaptation of the Trollope novels, *The Warden* and *Barchester Towers*. Popcorn provided. Let me know if you are interested.

Homework Club has started up again at the Laurel Hill Cemetery Gatehouse. Under the able direction of Barbara Freeman, this tutoring program for elementary school children meets Wednesday and Thursday afternoons. The children first (after a snack) work on their homework, and when that is completed, they can read or play games and other "enrichment" activities. Each Club ends with an abbreviated form of Evening Prayer. This volunteer effort is supported in part by grants from the Heuer Foundation and the East Falls Community Council. Our thanks goes to these two organizations, and to the volunteers who staff Homework Club. Additional volunteers are always welcome.

### ACA Offering

Annually we solicit a special offering for the support of the national operations of the Anglican Church in America. Every parish in the country gives \$30 for each communicant over the age of 18. I invite you to contribute. An envelope is enclosed for those of you who are parishioners – at least, it will be if we manage the mailing correctly. We hope that most of you will be able and willing to contribute the \$30 over and above your pledge. There are bound to be some who cannot. Those who can should. Those who cannot should not (and should not fret about it): we will make up the difference from parish funds. If you have any questions, or need an envelope, please ask. The envelopes may be placed in the Sunday collection, or mailed to the rectory (210 W. Allens Lane, Philadelphia, 19119). Please return them by the end of October. If you put your name on the envelope, we will include your contributions in the annual statement from the parish. Thanks!

### Kudos

Thanks goes this month to:

- my mother for doing the last *Chronicle* mailing (and probably this one).
- all who helped with the St Francis Animal Blessing (a number of our Mount Airy neighbors also came).
- Bill Lewis, Pat Lincoln, and others, who treat the Wednesday Bible study folk to home-made baked goodies.
- Homework Club volunteers: Barbara Freeman, Janis Wilson, Nancy Ousley, Melissa Smith, Beth Ousley.

Finally, I would note the death (on October 6<sup>th</sup>) of a faithful Christian and life-long parishioner, Celia Elizabeth Sugden. At 97, she was our oldest parishioner. She will be greatly missed. Our condolences to her son, Gary. May she rest in peace.

Faithfully,

*Janet Ousley*