

THE RECTOR'S CHRONICLE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

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Dear Parishioners and Friends,

Cynicism is one of those attitudes which we may not recognize as a problem for the Christian life. Some Christians are inclined in that direction by temperament; others may fall into it only occasionally. Either way, when we are under its sway, it seems to us that this is just the way the world is: hypocritical, destructive, selfish, lacking in virtue, incapable of anything truly noble. We focus on its failures – especially its failures to live up to my expectations for it. Cynicism about the world can be fed by CNN or the New York Times: hypocrisy, evil and human degradation seem to make for a successful news program or newspaper. Moreover, cynicism is profoundly (though usually unconsciously) selfish: that things are wrong with the world is taken as a personal offense. The world does not measure up to *my* standards, and its failings are offensive to *me*.

One can also be cynical about the church as well as the world, for the church also fails to meet expectations. It is full of sinners, after all, and it would hardly be surprising if it did not fall short. This is especially true when it is subject to worldly standards, which judge it exclusively by its good (worldly) works or political correctness, ignoring its responsibilities to worship and obey its Master.

Cynicism claims to be realism: this is the way the world is, so what can be wrong if I am cynical about it? It is this which makes cynicism a subtle temptation. For the world is a vale of tears; all men are sinners; some are hypocrites; true nobility is hard to find – not just because it is rare but because it is humble and thus tends to be invisible. In a sense, the cynic is correct about the world: it *is* full of evil, sorrow and disappointment. One alternative, sometimes embraced by Christians, is unbridled optimism: to claim that life is good. The problem with this is that it is an illusion: while there are remnants of the goodness God implanted in creation, it is fallen, and thus profoundly and fundamentally not good.

Fortunately, there is a third option – the Scriptural approach. This is that the world is to be seen as God sees it – a perspective to which we as Christians are admitted by God's grace and mercy. The root problem with cynicism is that it leaves out God. It forgets or denies His capacity for redeeming man from his folly and sin. The cynic does not see (or refuses to see) God's capacity and willingness to act in the world – and that He acts in the world in His way rather than ours. He does not immediately remove all sin, for that would remove the cynic as well as those he despises. None would survive. Rather He wishes to redeem the evils, to use them to sanctify people after the image of His Son. The evils remain evils, but are used in God's providence for good ends, just as the Cross is evil yet opens heaven.

This is the basis for Scriptural realism: the world is not a nice place. It holds sorrow, tribulation, persecution for Christians, and yet this does not mean that God is absent or that He has abandoned His people. Jesus – and Luke, Paul, Peter and the other New Testament writers – all speak of the adversities of the world and the sufferings Christians will experience. Yet they are also united in their testimony of the wonderful life which Christians have in Christ, by which they rise above the sorrows of the world, as Christ Himself did, rising from the dead. This allows for an attitude of joy and peace, which is as profoundly different from optimism as it is from cynicism.

It also allows God His proper place, as Lord of church and world. Creation is here to serve Him – not me. The cynic usurps God's place by acting as though the world (or church) must satisfy his standards, forgetting that the true Master is not man but God. This shows why cynicism is dangerous for a Christian. It leaves God out in such a way that self rushes in. So we need to be careful about our attitudes, especially those of us who are temperamentally prone to cynicism. The antidote is Christian realism: to remember that God does work in the world, and His method is to redeem evil by turning it to His own good ends, as He did the Cross. Pondering the Passion of our Lord will help foster true realism and a spirit of gratitude for all that He has done, both for the world and for me. When we are willing to be grateful for His providence, we are more likely to surrender to Him, accept His providence, and rejoice that He is Lord. He does after all run the world much better than I could.

Parish Meeting

All parishioners are encouraged to join in a congregational meeting after Mass on Sunday, July 25th (St James's Day), for a report on the recent Diocesan Synod. James Altena was our lay delegate, and he will help present the report. Since most of the Synod was devoted to questions about the proposed Anglican Ordinariate

(the structure which the recent Apostolic Constitution sets up in communion with the Roman Church), most of our discussions will likewise focus on the Ordinariate. We had hoped that we would have more or less complete answers at this Synod to many of the practical questions about how entering the Ordinariate would affect us. It did not turn out this way. But we did get a sense of how things are proceeding, what happens next, and what the likely time-frame is to be. We would like to share all this with you. I would prefer to do this in a meeting rather than in *Chronicle*, to allow for questions and clarifications. We also want to be sure that we have a list of all your questions which will need to be answered in order to make a considered decision in due course.

As I said last month, the first step in our discussion will be to help everyone be clear about exactly what entering into the Anglican Ordinariate would mean for us as individuals and as a parish – since we will be making such a decision somewhere down the road. Then the next step is to discern what God would have us do about it. This meeting is the beginning of the first step. It is important for us all to understand what is being proposed: until we understand the proposal, we cannot decide whether it would be a good thing or a bad thing for us at St Michael's. We have delayed the start of the process somewhat in the expectation what we would have more or less complete information by now. Even though this is not the case, it seems better not to leave everyone hanging any longer. So we will lay out what we know, and be clear about what we do not know. We will also share the anticipated process and timetable for what happens with the Ordinariate from here on. Please understand that this is a process for St Michael's: it will take some time, and will need to involve everyone. I know from experience that I can count on your generosity to give the time, effort, thought and prayer necessary to allow God to work in our midst through the process, however it comes out in the end.

Parish News

While the pace of things slows down a little in the summer (especially when it gets *really* hot in Philadelphia), things at St Michael's do not stop completely. During the week of July 11th, four of our youth will be going to Camp Treowth, the Diocesan youth camp in West Virginia. The following week, several others will be attending the Rock Mountain Bible Camp in the Poconos (sponsored by the local Reformed Episcopal Church Diocese), where many of our youth have gone in recent years. Some have scholarship support from the parish (your tithe dollars at work: send a kid to camp!) – thanks!

Also in July (19th-23rd), we host a week-long day camp at the Laurel Hill Cemetery Gatehouse for some of the younger children from the “old” neighborhood. Volunteers from the Child Evangelism Fellowship help put on the Bible camp program. Volunteers from the parish are also needed: please speak with Beth. Prayers appreciate for all the camps.

Except when I am out of town on vacation, the weekday Masses continue on the usual schedule. I mention this, because attendance can flag somewhat in the summer, which is to be expected with people out of town on holiday. Perhaps you are in a position to pick up the slack. Perhaps your vacation has not taken you out of town, and allows you the time to come to Mass on a weekday or two. I would note that unlike much of the rectory, the Oratory is air-conditioned for your worshipping comfort.

West Laurel Hill Cemetery had an Open House the end of June to showcase their restoration and new construction in the Columbarium and Crematory which is attached to the Chapel of Peace. As the President of West Laurel Hill, “Pete” Hoskins, said in his remarks on the occasion, it was a facility well ahead of its time when it was built in 1938. The new work, which includes a new retort (for cremations) and witnessing area, handicapped-accessible bathroom, and additional interment space for ashes, is intended to keep the facility up to date. Feel free to give yourself a tour after Mass on Sunday – and note that the bathroom is now ready for use. (This is the area off the “south” side of the Chapel, opposite the cloister where we have coffee hour in the winter.)

I enclose an article by Fr Gavin Dunbar, the rector of St John's Church in Savannah, Georgia, from their parish newsletter. It provides an excellent summary of the issues surrounding the use of “Father” for God, something commonly challenged these days. I hope you find it useful.

Kudos

Thanks goes this month to:

- my mother, for last month's *Chronicle* mailing.
- those who contributed to camp scholarship support this summer.
- a special thank-you to James Altena (and Leslie) for attending the Diocesan Synod (at their own expense) and ably representing the parish.

Faithfully,

