

THE MESSENGER

*A seasonal publication by and for the community of Saint Ann's
to inform and involve them in its activities, programs and ministries.*

Holy Week/Eastertide 2008

"I'm being inquired after; my presence is desired, even needed - or so it seems."

Dear Friends:

Over the course of my years I've walked into many churches. I've also walked into some churches many times. But the thought occurred to me this week that, for all the time spent and all the places I've visited, I've still often missed the most central reason for being there and, just so, too, I've missed the very experience that lies at the core of belief and faithfulness.

I tend to visit other churches as tourists do. They can be interesting buildings, evocative in beauty, expressive and moving. At Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York City people stroll up and down the aisles, gazing at the intricate windows, the hats of cardinals hanging from the ceiling high above, the massive stone pillars, the ornate altar. Sometimes, even as services are underway, the wandering continues, and the bustle of the gift shop can be heard in the background. It's easy in any unfamiliar church to notice the style and form of the architecture, to look for the organ, to admire the various appointments, to imagine what worship would be like.

But in all this browsing, what can get lost is the most primary purpose of the church. It's a place set apart for prayer, for conversation with God, for thoughtfulness about faith and life, for meditation. And yet, when was the last time you stepped into a strange church to spend an hour focused on God rather than on artwork and accoutrements?

In a similar manner, the churches we attend as members tend to stand empty until, at designated times, scheduled worship takes place. Where possible, we fit specific services into our calendar. We arrive close to the last minute, gather with others, move through a set liturgy, and then head out into the rest of the day. Few come early. Few stay late. Life has become a continual exercise of simply getting things done, completing tasks and immediately picking up new ones. How utterly odd it would seem to many of us to sit at length in a pew at Saint Ann's when no one else is around, when nothing has been prepared, when no bulletin clearly sets out an order of things to be done.

But a church is not just a special theater or a large utility room for meetings. It's not merely a community meetinghouse. It's holy ground, designed for personal devotions. Yet it's almost never used this way. Most of us don't think about just stopping in, anytime. Most of us wouldn't feel comfortable alone in contemplation. Our building is never closed or locked, nonetheless, almost without exception, it remains largely unused. It simply doesn't occur to us that something important can happen in a church apart from organized activities. Yet often, what we need most, is uncluttered time in which to converse with God as we might converse with a friend while sitting on a beach - at ease, our conversation punctuated by indefinite stretches of silence, thinking many things, saying a few.

I grew up at a time when most families ate dinner together and most households didn't have dishwashers. Part of the ritual of every evening was washing and drying dishes with another member of the family. The most interesting part of this practice was that, somehow, mysteriously, the conversations we held while working together were completely different from any others. We spoke more intimately, less argumentatively. It was a very ripe time. In a similar way, too, we converse differently when traveling together in cars. We are afforded a certain freedom of expression that is harder to realize in other contexts. Some things are best discussed - or only ever discussed - by means of driving.

Worship

A happiness that is sought for ourselves alone can never be found:
for a happiness that is diminished by being shared is not big
enough to make us happy. There is no end to the sharing of love.
Infinite sharing is the law of God's inner life.*

More time is needed to allow the dust of our lives to settle and old memories to re-gather; we need the kind of stillness and silence by which our deepest soulful yearnings can arise so that the still, small voice of God can respond with surprising newness and freshness

It is no different with God. The corporate worship services we hold are the major festival expressions of our faith, but they can provide only limited experiences of God. Much that is important simply can't be realized or contemplated within these liturgies. More space is needed for reflection. More time is needed to allow the dust of our lives to settle and old memories to re-gather; we need the kind of stillness and silence by which our deepest soulful yearnings can arise so that the still, small voice of God can respond with surprising newness and freshness. This cannot happen when we are always racing several steps ahead of ourselves or when all we want to hear from church is our own ideas echoed back to us.

Over the past several weeks, Pat Davidson has been offering time of guided reflections and prayer on Tuesday evenings, from 5:30 until 6:30. The church is dimly lit but sparkles with candlelight. People come in silence and leave in the same manner. Pat offers a number of collects, reads from the Gospel, and periodically provides direction for meditation, but most of the time is filled with quietness. And out of that stillness remarkable private conversations begin. Things long stifled come to mind and heart. Old stories blossom. God speaks in an entirely different way. In our time, which is so polluted by wasteful words and the white noise of chatter, this time is particularly blessed. I cannot commend it highly enough.

But more than all else, I dream of a time when the church will once again be treated and approached as a true house of God - not a place where God is contained but where God waits for us, and we, at any hour, feel free to meet with God, in a space where the pressures of the world are momentarily relieved and our focus can be made more true. This requires nothing of us except our willingness to venture into the church by ourselves - which is daring. It would be an adventure. Ad-venturam. Something new added to an old, old habit. This is my plea. Stop by the church sometime, anytime. Find a seat - in a pew or even up within the sanctuary. Stay for thirty minutes. Let your mind wander. Let your heart seek. Let your ears hear a voice that isn't your own. Ponder, as Mary did. You won't be the same when you walk out.

There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence... [and that is] activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.
Thomas Merton

Worship

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The Assistant Rector Janie Donohue

As we approach Holy Week, it seems appropriate to offer some reflections on our Holy Lent. For many of us, Lent is understood to be a time of sacrifice, a time to deny ourselves and be reminded of the hard work to which we are called as Christians. While self denial is clearly a prerequisite for Christian mission and service, for many of us it is where we stop. In my experience it is in this “stopping” that we often hear God saying, like the Ginsu Knife commercial, “But wait, there's more!”

Denying self as an end, after which we pull up our boot-straps and get to work, belies the assumption that it is our charge to usher in the Kingdom of God through a series of arduous efforts to make the world a better place. We do so with God's blessing and inspiration, of course, but essentially the work is ours to execute.

Holy Week is the culmination of a journey to the Cross which we walk with Christ through our services and communal celebrations. We cheer from the sidelines at the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. We sup with Christ on Maundy Thursday, and struggle with him in the Garden of Gethsemane. We lunge to cut off the ears of the Roman guards who have come to capture and kill our King. With equal passion, we raise our voices as the crowd shouting “crucify him,” terrified of the implications of such a radical overturning of the world as we know it. We are Peter denying Christ when faced with public ridicule, we are Mary at the empty tomb thinking the risen Christ is “the gardener,” missing until the last the reality in front of our eyes—“He is risen!” This is our story, as God's people, and it is the story of the life of our triune God lived among us. The seasons of Lent and Easter afford us the opportunity to reaffirm our incorporation into this story through our baptism and confirmation.

Having held the mirror of Lent and Holy week to our hearts and lives, we fall on our faces at the feet of the Cross, acknowledging our faithlessness and frailty. But acute awareness of our failures and unworthiness in the face of the work of God on the cross is that which prepares us to enter into the Christian life, it is not the power platform from which we live it. It is because we have “hidden” our identities in the life, death and resurrection of Christ that we can “execute” the work of ministry. It is because that Spirit of God which raised Christ from the dead dwells in and works through us, that we can offer any hope to our wounded world. It is not because we are really, really sorry and really, really grateful.

This is extremely good news for us and for the world we serve, since self-propelled ministry is inevitably flimsy and usually draining. May we use these final Lenten days to let go of our anxieties about the negligible impact of our “bootstrap” efforts. May we prepare ourselves, rather, to be vessels of Spirit power. It's infinitely more rewarding and way more fun.

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Mission

What is the value of a virtuous life, if it be a life without love and without mercy. Love is the gift of God's mercy to human sorrow, not the reward of human self-sufficiency.*

Outreach

A long obedience in a single direction.

Love Baskets - Nancy and Dot

The sun was shining as we arrived to assemble the baskets and the happy faces of the crew made us feel we were going to experience the lovely day that it turned out to be. Many hands make light work, so we are told, and this proved to be so true. We all set to work and soon the task was completed. Deliveries were made to many in the nursing homes and the happy faces of those receiving the results of our collective efforts was worth more than one could imagine. A total of ninety four persons - in three nursing homes and shut-ins in our parish were the recipients. All of this was made possible by the generosity of the parishioners and we thank one and all from the bottom of our hearts.

Soup Kitchens

Essex - Judy Hutchinson chairs this small committee who serve meals at St. John's in Essex (Kitty Law, Pat Rogerson, Dorothy Smith and Judy). They are looking for more folks to help cook and serve. Saint Ann's is responsible for the following dates: April 22, June 17 and August 12.

Old Lyme - Maggie Faulkner chairs this outreach ministry which serves between 80 and 90 on Saturday mornings. Saint Ann's is responsible for the following dates: June 7, August 2 and October 4.

Saint Ann's Can - Jennifer Mathanol is heading up a canned meat drive for which we have pledged 700 cans per month to go to the Food Pantry. So whenever you see tuna or chicken or any other canned meat on sale, please buy an extra can!

Dominican Republic

Due to housing complications in San Pedro, or original trip, scheduled for this summer, has been rescheduled for February 14-21, 2009. If you think you might like to be part of this worthwhile endeavor, please contact the Rector or Kathy Kronholm or sign-up on the sheet outside the Griswold Room. We will be sending detailed information to all who sign-up on April 1st, and a team will be selected by April 10. A meeting has been set for **April 15** to begin the task of becoming a cohesive work. The process is long and involved and must consist of dedicated, focused individuals who have a desire to make this ministry high on their priority list. The process will include monthly meetings and local service projects as well as a monetary commitment from each chosen team member.

The next meeting of the Outreach Committee will be held April 8th at 5:30pm.

**Dominican Republic
Work Team Mission Trip
scheduled for
February 14-21, 2009**

Communion

But if we live for others . . . we will see that we are human, like everyone else, that we all have weaknesses and deficiencies, and that these limitations play a most important part in all our lives. It is because of them that we need others and others need us.*

Can you tell the difference between
a bouzouki and a balalaika?
Do you know a sirtaki from a souvlaki?
If you can't tell baklava from bundt cake,
but love Greek food, save



Saturday, April 26th



for our
Big Fun Greek Dinner

to be held in
the Griswold Room.

Watch for the poster
and sign up sheet
on the counter...

April 26th ~
Big Fun Greek Dinner

Wine & Dine

The Parish Life Committee is pleased to present the third series of Wine and Dine to be held on

April 19 and May 17

Please see the enclosed flyer for details and use the enclosed form to complete your reservation by March 30. We look forward to great participation and lots of fun.

April 19 & May 17 ~
Wine & Dine

Ordination Thanks

Most sincere and joy filled thanks to all of you who contributed your time talents and love to my ordination day. Thank you to hosts, cooks, designers, servers, ushers, readers, altar guild workers, providers of communion bread, seamstresses, singers, directors, readers, artists and roustabouts. And a special thank you to all who opened their homes to my visiting family. It was a truly remarkable day in my life; I am so grateful to God for placing me in this community.