



All Saints' News

October, 2004

All Saints' hits Cyberspace on the way to Heaven

Thanks to the talent of Nancy Luke, All Saints' now has a website. The address is:

<http://www.allsaintstybee.org/> Tap it up and see what you think! Nancy would be glad to hear any suggestions about what would make it better.

Seasonal thoughts on Christianity

A woman was asked by a co-worker, "What is it like to be a Christian?"



The co-worker replied, "It's like being a pumpkin. God picks you from the patch, brings you in, and washes all the dirt off you. Then He cuts off the top and scoops out all the yucky stuff. He removes the seeds of doubt, hate, greed, etc., and then He carves you a new smiling face and puts His light inside you to shine for all the world to see."

Contributed by Lu Ann Harris

Yard Sale is Saturday, October 23

Start gathering your items for discard NOW for the yard sale! It's a great way to unclutter your life as well as help the ECW. As my friend said to me when I started dating her ex-husband, "One person's trash is another one's treasure!"

All Saints at All Saints

All Saints' Day will be celebrated on Sunday, November 7, and the *Ensemble con Spirito* will be our musical guests. Start planning now what fabulous dish you plan to bring for the pot luck luncheon afterwards. Okay, so it doesn't have to be fabulous, but the company and the good time definitely will be!

Help Wanted!

We are seeking a person who is willing to fold, stamp and stick labels on our monthly newsletter and take it to the post office. If you are willing to volunteer every month or every other month, please contact Louise Anderson or Jane Bridges.

Bible Study Resumes

A great thing about the return of fall is that the Bible study has resumed on Wednesday nights. We start with Evening Prayer in Church at 7:00 PM, followed by Bible Study until 8:00. On the first Wednesday of each month, we'll start with the Holy Eucharist. Come join us!

What's going on in Sunday School?

Welcome to Witness!

Witness Sunday School Curriculum is a great way to teach the kids you know and care about how to "learn from the bible to Live the Good News." What is the good news? God promises, provides, and is present throughout human history. God the Father, Son, and Spirit is for us and with us, wherever we are and in whatever we do. God is also for others: in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our churches, and all around the world. That is news worth sharing!

As God's children, young and old, teachers and learners, we are witnesses to God's action in the world. Our salvation story is a story of God's gifts of Word, faith, and service.; Each of these gifts functions as both meaningful connection and joyful invitation. *Word* connects us with the Biblical story and invites us to use our minds to learn to make good choices and communicate with others.

Faith connects us with God's family and invites us to explore and affirm our identity as the church. *Service* connects us with our sisters and brothers, using Jesus as our model, and invites us to act lovingly for them. In *Witness*, your learners will encounter many ways to witness to others by exploring how they can express their faith in daily life with family, friends, the broader community, and God's creation.

The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold
St. Paul's Cathedral, London
September 12, 2004

Readings: 1 Timothy 1: 12-17; Luke 15: 1-10

In this world of ours, beset by hostility and violence, mercy and compassion seem strangely out of place, if not altogether irrelevant. Today's readings invite us to ponder the surprising and insistent ways of God's mercy, and therefore to give root-room to the divine compassion in our own lives.

In the context in which we find ourselves this invitation may seem remote or naive. And yet, compassion is God's very nature writ large in the person of Jesus, who is the embodiment of mercy, and calls us to be merciful, just as our heavenly Father is merciful.

Paul, the persecutor, in the full force of his violent hostility "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord," was accosted, shattered and riven through by God's profligate and unbounded compassion. His self-constructed righteousness collapsed. All that had formerly given meaning and direction to his life was overturned. The self-described blasphemer, persecutor and man of violence was embraced and held fast in the arms of God's mercy. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, Paul experienced all at once the overflowing grace of the risen Christ and the love of God worked into his mind and heart. God's mercy can be wild and unsettling; it can confute and undermine our all too limited notions of mercy. The divine compassion may, on occasion, play havoc with the limits and boundaries we set, albeit in God's name. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, says the Lord."

Nowhere does this become more true than in the life of the church where there is a constant tension between a concern for boundaries and fidelity to the Spirit whom Jesus likens to the wind blowing "where it chooses." Since the time of the Acts of the Apostles the Holy Spirit has had the habit of stretching the community of believers to make room for new realities by showing up in unexpected places and descending upon those considered to be

outside the household of faith. The parables Jesus sets before us in today's Gospel reading underscore the insistence and urgency of the divine compassion as being integral to his own ministry. The shepherd goes after the lost sheep "until he finds it." The woman searches carefully for the lost silver coin "until she finds it." Nothing will stay either of them from finding what is lost, nor will anything stay God in Christ from drawing all together in the reconciling love of which mercy and compassion are its most forceful and direct expression.

Three years ago, on the fourteenth of September, Holy Cross Day, I visited what has become known as Ground Zero, the site of the Towers of the World Trade Center. Before going to the actual site, I stopped at the Seaman's Church Institute, a nearby church agency being used as a rest and feeding center for the firemen and police and others trying to cope with what had happened three days before. Before leaving I was asked to preside at the Eucharist in the Institute chapel. In the gospel reading for the day, Jesus, anticipating his death declares, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Our visit to the scene of the devastation took us by St. Paul's Chapel. Seeing the gate was open, I asked our driver to stop. The door was unlocked. I entered. A layer of fine ash covered every surface. Though only a block away from the World Trade Center no damage had been done, not even a pane of glass had been broken. The church was empty and silent. Behind the altar stood an antique crucifix, its tiny brass arms extended toward the

destruction and horror, the grief and rage and madness that lay beyond.

Suddenly the words of the day's gospel came to mind, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people -- all things -- to myself."

I knew in that moment that beyond anything I could think or feel or do there was Another whose compassion and mercy were able to embrace it all, and that it was only in the power of that embrace that we, and our world, would be able to find the way forward. Sadly, we have chosen a path that only intensifies the very evil we are seeking to overcome and therefore makes reconciliation that much more remote.

Compassion is not an abstraction, a fleeting emotion; it is a matter of having what St. Paul calls "the mind of Christ." Compassion is the work of the Spirit forming Christ in us and rendering our hearts compassionate. And what is a compassionate heart? Each of us may have an answer.

St. Isaac of Syria asked this question many centuries ago, and here is his reply: "It is a heart that burns with love for the whole of creation -- for humankind, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons, for every creature. When a person with a heart such as this thinks of the creatures or looks at them, his eyes are filled with tears. An overwhelming compassion makes his heart grow small and weak, and he cannot endure to hear or see any suffering, even the smallest pain, inflicted upon any creature. Therefore he never ceases to pray, with tears even for the irrational animals, for the enemies of truth, and for those who do him evil, asking that they may be guarded and receive God's mercy. And for the reptiles also he prays with a great compassion, which rises up endlessly in his heart until he shines again and is glorious like God." No amount of active imagination or psychological effort on our part can produce a compassionate heart. Only the insistent and urgent compassion of Christ, enfolding the demons and reptiles that lurk in the secret places within us, can render us truly compassionate. And it is only the compassion of Christ worked in us by the Spirit that can give us the expansiveness of heart which will allow us to extend our arms with the

courageous and unwavering and all-embracing mercy of Christ himself. It is a mercy that can embrace even the demons and reptiles, the enemies of truth and those who do us evil.

The Eucharist we celebrate each Sunday is about compassion. Christ's self gift in Scripture and under the forms of Bread and Wine is his continual reaching out to us in order to draw us to himself, and to indwell us in the radical fullness of his love. Over time the Eucharist conforms us to the image of Christ and we become signs of his real presence made manifest in acts of profligate and, at times, provocative compassion.

The Eucharist, therefore, is dangerous. More may happen to us than we intend. The seemingly safe consumption of a morsel of bread and a sip of wine may draw us beyond ourselves into the force field of God's mercy. Our security may be undermined. Our certitudes may be challenged. We may be left defenseless -- and therefore more permeable to the unpredictable motions and demands of the Spirit.

On 21 May 1996 an Algerian Terrorist group -- the GIA -- beheaded seven French Trappist monks who, against all advice, decided to remain at their abbey in the Atlas Mountains alongside their Muslim neighbors with whom they had established deep bonds of affection. Their compassion and their vow of stability led them to stay put in spite of all dangers.

Five days after their assassination, on 26 May, the Feast of Pentecost that year, the testament of one of the slaughtered monks, Père Crétien was opened and read. It was dated 1 January 1994, two-and-one-half years before his kidnapping and murder. To me, it is a profound expression of what St. Isaac describes as a compassionate heart, and what it means to live one's life "hidden with Christ in God" through word and sacrament. It reads in part:

If it should happen one day -- and it could be today -- that I become a victim of the terrorism which now seems ready to engulf all the foreigners living in Algeria, I would like my community, my Church and my family to remember that my life was GIVEN to God and to this country. I ask them to accept the fact that the One Master of all life was not a

stranger to this brutal departure. I would ask them to pray for me: for how could I be found worthy of such an offering? I ask them to associate this death with so many other equally violent ones which are forgotten through indifference or anonymity. My life has no more value than any other.

I would like, when the time comes, to have a moment of spiritual clarity which would allow me to beg forgiveness of God and of my fellow human beings, and at the same time forgive with all my heart the one who will strike me down. Obviously, my death will appear to confirm those who hastily judged me naïve or you were doing: Yes, I want this THANK YOU and this "A-DIEU" to be for you, too, because in God's face I see yours. May we meet again as happy thieves in Paradise, if it please God, the Father of us both.

Here is the witness of a contemporary: a man who allowed the compassion of Christ to inhabit the whole of his being. Was he perfect? No. Those who knew him could tell you of his thorns and imperfections. Like the Apostle Paul, the Patron of this great Cathedral Church, Père Crétien was captured and transformed by Christ's unbounded compassion. Love overleaps all boundaries and his deadly enemy is declared, "my last-minute friend." While hostility and violence remain very much with us and almost daily assume new and more hideous forms -- as we have just seen in Beslan, Russia -- let us draw strength from the witness of St. Paul, Isaac of Syria, and Père Crétien. Let us pray that Christ, through the Bread and Wine we are about to receive, will so draw us to himself that his mercy and deathless compassion will become our own. Let us pray that we -- wherever we find ourselves -- may be signs, agents and ministers of his all-embracing love for this fragile and fractured world. Let us pray also that we may be signs, agents and ministers of his love within the church, whose mission is to proclaim and live the costly and all-demanding mystery of reconciliation.

"Glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine."

Amen.

**All Saints' Episcopal Church
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idealistic: "Let him tell us now what he thinks of it!" But these persons should know that finally my most avid curiosity will be set free. This is what I shall be able to do, please God: immerse my gaze in that of the Father to contemplate with him His children of Islam just as he sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, the fruit of His Passion, filled with the Gift of the Spirit whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and restore the likeness, playing with the differences. Père Crétien then addresses his assassin, the one who will do him evil: And also you, my last-minute friend, who will not have known what

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