

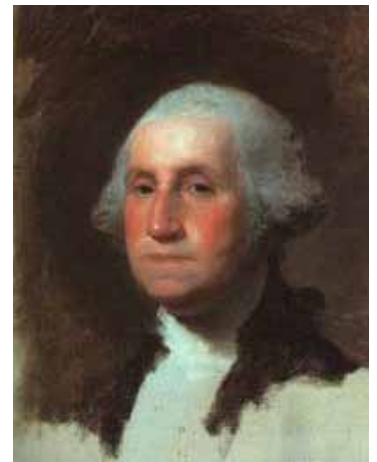
Weekly Musings + February 21, 2011

It is Presidents Day today. In passing I should mention George Washington, our first president and an Anglican. Washington regularly attended church with his wife though there is no record that he ever took communion. Indeed he later absented himself on communion Sundays. He was of course a deist, one who thinks that God is the grand watch maker, setting the universe to ticking and then watching detachedly. It is easy to make fun of deists, but they came up with this rather remarkable statement in the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

One could do far worse; I am sure you will agree.

Here is Gilbert's famous unfinished portrait of Washington which graced every classroom when I was in school, a veritable secular icon. Nowadays it is photo-shopped into completion.



This week includes the martyrdom of St. Polycarp of Smyrna (156). Smyrna is in Asia Minor and is the reputed birth place of Homer and is one of the seven churches of Asia Minor in the Book of Revelation. We have extant writings from him and to him, the latter most notably from Ignatius, bishop of Antioch. Antioch eventually became the see city of one of the four Patriarchs of the Eastern Church, the other three being Alexandria, Jerusalem and Constantinople.

Ignatius says this in his preface to his letter to Polycarp: "While I was impressed with your godly mind, which is fixed, as it were, on an immovable rock, I am more than grateful that I was granted the sight of your holy face." Polycarp himself wrote to the Philippians: "Let us, then, hold steadfastly and unceasingly to our Hope and to the Pledge of our righteousness, that is, Christ Jesus . . ." His writing is not profound. He uses much from the writings of others including scripture. However, he lived in a time of persecution and his work, as it should be, urges steadfastness, remembers the promises of the first witnesses (the apostles) and urges his readers to endure suffering. He is a link between the apostles and the first serious Christian theologians.

He was martyred late in life. An account of his martyrdom is quite lengthy and famous. No part is more famous than his comment to the Roman proconsul who urged him to take the pagan oath: "Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

He was killed horribly and then his body burned. The faithful immediately gathered up his bones as relics, material emblems of faithfulness unto death.

It is fair to say that preaching on the blood of the martyrs is not one of my sermons that you look forward to, but I do it from time to time anyway. An understanding of this vast stream which has nourished the church is crucial to an understanding of deep Christianity.

News from St. Luke's

Shrove Tuesday comes on March 8 and Ash Wednesday on March 9. Details are to follow. Rather than a pamphlet for Lent this year, I have a 150 page book called "The Desert- An Anthology for Lent" that gives sayings of the desert fathers and others for each day of Lent. It is available for \$10.

Remember that we are going to have a Bible study and potluck on Tuesday nights in Lent. We will be looking at the coming Sunday's lectionary. The hope is that this will continue after Lent and become a permanent Tuesday night fixture.

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See page two for parish life cartoon.

