

Weekly Musing † January 16, 2012

In the midst of this freezing cold and blowing snow, imagine the desert of Egypt to the west of the Red Sea in a barren, hot and dry place and there, within a cave, we find St. Antony of the Desert, Abbot in Egypt who lived apparently a very long life from about 251 to 356 A.D.

It is very difficult for us to see the appeal of St. Antony to his contemporaries. Given the march of history it is probably impossible to imagine the time in which he lived. The middle class was long from being invented, beds as we know them didn't exist, most people did not wear shoes nor read and write. The expectations of life were nothing like we know them and that makes an enormous difference. Nonetheless, people still yearned after Christ and a life devoted to him. The form of that life was very different from ours. Most devout Christians assumed a monastic life, mostly solitary (the monks who lived primarily in community were quite a ways down the road) was the best and perhaps only way to salvation. Towards the end of his life, many flocked to St. Antony in the desert seeking to imitate the by now ancient man who lived mostly in a cave where he meditated and prayed. There was a sort of basic life of community (which St. Antony himself was the first to establish) but it was a solitary life of privation in which the greatest task was not anything close to the usefulness that so dominates us now, but rather fighting the temptations of the devil and his demons who were viewed anything but metaphorically.



Brueghel 16th Century

Here is what was written about St. Antony by St. Athanasius (296 – 373) or perhaps one of his community:

So he was alone in the inner mountain, spending his time in prayer and discipline. And the brethren who served him asked that they might come every month and bring him olives, pulse and oil, for by now he was an old man. There then he passed his life, and endured such great wrestlings, 'Not against flesh and blood,' as it is written, but against opposing demons, as we learned from those who visited him. For there they heard tumults, many voices, and, as it were, the clash of arms. At night they saw the mountain become full of wild beasts, and him also fighting as though against visible beings, and praying against them. And those who came to him he encouraged, while kneeling he contended and prayed to the Lord. Surely it was a marvellous thing that a man, alone in such a desert, feared neither the demons who rose up against him, nor the fierceness of the four-footed beasts and creeping things, for all they were so many. But in truth, as it is written, 'He trusted in the Lord as Mount Sion,' with a mind unshaken and undisturbed; so that the demons rather fled from him, and the wild beasts, as it is written, 'kept peace with him.'



By the time of the middle ages in Europe, St. Antony was very popular. The monastic ideal had amazing longevity and of course there are monastics even today. If a Byzantine emperor actually lived out his useful term of office he rather routinely became a monk and his wife a nun. This was in done in large part to expiate his many sins.

We live in an age in which more than just a little talk of sin is considered strange if not counter productive. Not so for most of the history of Christianity. It might be fair to say that the cost of our obsession with comfort, security and pleasure has been at the cost of an atrophied conscience. It is always tempting to think that the current trends of history are inexorable but in truth things rise and fall while new things appear. The next chapters of historical Christianity have yet to be discerned.



News from St. Luke's

The annual meeting follows the 10 am service this coming Sunday, January 22. We start with a light lunch. We will look over the financials for last year and see the 2012 budget. We will elect wardens, vestry persons and delegates to diocesan convention in Helena. We will also elect some members for the Memorial Foundation. We need a quorum.



The Episcopal Church Women (ECW) will hold its monthly meeting on Saturday, January 21, at 10 am in the Guild Room. All women of the parish are invited to attend.

The youth group will meet Wednesday at 6 pm. Dinner is provided and friends are always invited.

Youth Confirmation starts February 15 at 5 pm.

The vestry meets this coming Tuesday (January 17) at 6:30 pm.

*The Rev. Canon Gary Waddingham
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Regional Canon, Diocese of Montana*

DECIDING WHETHER TO GO TO CHURCH OR THE FOOTBALL MATCH



CHURCH



FOOTBALL

YOU NEED TO MAKE YOUR OWN MIND UP
REALLY. THERE IS NOTHING THAT I COULD SAY
THAT WOULD CONVINCE YOU ONE WAY OR THE OTHER