

Weekly Musing † January 23, 2012

When we study the saints of the church it seems like those who were part of the early church are most often martyrs and terribly persecuted while those of later times had it easier. Sometimes that is true and sometimes it is not. It is not true with Florence Li Tim-Oi, the first Anglican priest who was a woman.

Florence (named after Florence Nightingale) was born in China in 1907. She was active in the church and in 1931 witnessed the ordination of a woman deaconess. She decided that “being set apart” was something to which she was called. World War II came to China in horrible ways via the Japanese who had ravaged the country only a few years earlier. Thousands of refugees came to the neutral Portuguese colony of Macau. Bishop Robert Hall made Florence a Deacon (not deaconess) in 1941 and she ministered to these refugees. The war made it virtually impossible for a priest to come with the sacraments so in 1944 Bishop Hall, after consulting with his brother Chinese bishops, ordained Florence Li Tim-Oi to the Sacred Order of Priests. She ministered faithfully to the refugees in more difficult situations.



After the war, her ordination came under brutal criticism. Her ordaining bishop, Bishop Robert Hall was censured by the Archbishop of Canterbury and there were calls for his resignation. Florence gave up her license to officiate but not her priesthood in 1946 in order to save Bishop Hall from further criticism. How quickly

an ungrateful church forgot her sacrifices in war and the presence of Christ she brought to Christians. This is a good case study in what the church does wrong.

Under the Maoists in China, Florence suffered. She was denied Christianity and could not talk to fellow Christians lest she put them in peril. She was made to work in a factory and a farm commune. The Red Guard made her cut her vestments into pieces. She considered suicide. She later said she “went up the mountain to pray.” Thirty-four years later, she was able to immigrate to Toronto to be with a sister. This was in 1976. In 1984 her priestly faculties were restored and she functioned as a priest once again at the age of 77. She became something of a celebrity, which she never sought. Interestingly, much of her biography is relatively hard to find on the internet. She is celebrated as the first woman priest in the Anglican Communion, but her privations at the hands of the Red Guard are often not even mentioned.



When Bishop Hall ordained her to the priesthood, he thought of the story of the righteous Gentile, Cornelius, who receives Jesus' ministrations in the gospel, the first gentile to do so. The idea of Christianity being withheld from gentiles seems ridiculous to us now and something of a non-sequitur. One hopes the same will one day be said of women serving before God's altar as priests in all Christian churches.

News from St. Luke's

Thanks to all of you who came to the Annual Meeting. Lisa Malody is our new Senior Warden, Holly Brown is the Junior Warden and Richard Wood, Mike Jackson and Allen Kent are elected to the vestry. We could use two more vestry persons if someone is interested in being appointed by the vestry. Our delegates to diocesan convention (Helena, October 12-14) are Lee & Carla Stadtmiller, Libby Laird, Janet & Aaron Morgenstern and Nancy McManus. Thanks to all of those who served in our various ministries at St. Luke's this past year and who serve this year as well.

Youth Confirmation starts Wed., February 14, in the Library. Young people in the 6th or 7th grade are welcome to come.

The youth group meets Wednesdays at 6 pm. Dinner is served.

Yes, it will be here in a month . . . Lent! We will have our usual Stations of the Cross on Friday and a Bible study with soup on Tuesday evenings. Books and pamphlets for study will be available. Easter is April 8th.

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