

Weekly Musing † November 14, 2011

There is a plethora of saints to choose from this week. It is always tempting to choose a saint from sometime before the protestant reformation of 500 years ago. Because those times are distant from our own, it is easy to assign sainthood, particularly if it was a time of persecution or the martyr-producing time of the spread of Christianity in Europe. The closer we get to the present, the more the lives of the saints are subject to the scrutiny of the modern mindset, including of course, political issues.

Samuel Seabury (1729 – 1796) is well known if for no other reason than his name has been enshrined in various institutions in our American Episcopal Church. He studied theology at Yale and medicine at Edinburgh. Of course there were no bishops in the American church until his time, despite the fact that the Anglican Church had been alive and well in America for a long time, the first parish being established in Virginia in 1607. Thus all priests had to be ordained in England. There are many reasons for there not being a bishop in the American Church. Bishops cost a fortune, at the time. They required a home that would be considered palatial, servants, and a lot of money, perhaps raised through taxation. In addition, it is fair to say that the episcopacy in England was inexorably tied up with the aristocracy. Many bishops were second and third sons of lords, the first sons having inherited the title and family estates. America had no sympathy for an

aristocracy. Most of us still don't. Finally, the church in England was a state church and that was not to be the American model. No place was the church more anchored to the state than in the office of the bishop who was in fact chosen by the government.

During the Revolutionary War, the Anglican Church in America suffered in proportion to the latitude of the geographical location of same. The first colonies in America were southern, something we tend to forget. Since the first colonies were in the south, they became financially independent from England earlier. The parishes and priests in the north were often supported by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in England. It is worth pointing out that they had taken an oath to the King when they were ordained (part of the baggage of a state church). Thus the northern clergy were generally Royalists in the American Revolution.

When Seabury came to England to be consecrated bishop, he could not be consecrated by English bishops because he could not take the oath of allegiance to the British monarch. He found sympathy with the Scottish bishops who were non-juring, that is, they did not pledge allegiance to the monarch. The great importance of this is that the Scottish bishops convinced Seabury to adopt a new prayer book in accord with theirs. That meant that it included the Invocation in the Eucharist. If you remember the 1928 Prayer Book, the Invocation is labeled as such by those handy italics to the right side that told you what was going on. The Invocation asks the Holy Spirit to come down and "bless and sanctify" the bread and wine. The English prayer book, of a lower churchmanship, had only the words of Institution ("Take eat, this is my body . . .") This may seem to you like an unimportant detail but for many of us, it is of great importance. It takes us away from the notion of the Eucharist as invoked magic (this is admittedly a caricature) and into a place where the grace of God in the form of the Holy Spirit makes things holy, not us.

Believe it or not there was a time, especially in the eastern (Orthodox Church) when the laity actually fought about theological nuances found in the language of the confession and the creeds. To think that there was such an era makes me practically weepy. Seabury's influence on the church was monumental. When two more bishops were consecrated, the requisite three could consecrate bishops on their own.



News from St. Luke's

Thanks to all who gave to the Episcopal Church's Women's Dress-a-Child program. Over \$1,400 was raised. This means we can go on a buying trip with 14 children. This is an important part of our mission at St. Luke's.

Although there will be a newsletter before then, remember that next week we have our Thanksgiving Eve service at 7 pm. (Wednesday, November 23). One of the nice things about this vehicle (the email newsletter) is that I don't have to say things about Advent and that holiday that comes after it, until right ahead of time. Alleluia. I note that a newer kind of church (nomenclature is difficult here) is already advertising stuff for that holiday that comes after Advent. By all means, let's jump to the fun and cheery stuff right now because we probably deserve it. That reminds me of kids who take drugs. They feel themselves entitled to feeling good without any sort of achievement or work; give me happiness now.

The youth group continues to meet on Wednesday at 6 pm. We have another 4H meeting this Wednesday at 5 pm. We need to get the forms in for the projects in order to take them to the County Agent.

You will soon get a letter about our Pledge Drive for the coming year. I hope you prayerfully consider what you should give.

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