

Weekly Musing ☩ November 7, 2011

There are several saints days this week. I am choosing St. Martin, Bishop of Tours (397) to rescue from the dark mists of history not to mention rescuing him from the curse of sentimentality, an ever present danger to authentic Christianity. Since Martin lived sixteen hundred years ago, we have to rely on sources for his life that are on occasion a bit suspect, having been added to and given a spin by the well meaning pious of later generations. In many ways it is instructive to focus on what parts of his life have been enshrined by Christian hagiography.

The most famous story of St. Martin finds him a soldier in Amiens (northern France). He sees a beggar without clothing, so the story goes, splits his cape in two, and gives half to the beggar. I see no reason to disbelieve this story. I like it because it is a realistic model of giving. Martin still retains half of the cloak for himself (soldiers used them to sleep in, among other things) and gives half to the beggar. My least favorite “truism” about giving is the saying that goes something like “we hardly even missed it.” If one doesn’t miss what one gave, one probably didn’t give enough.

St. Martin was known for healing and championing the oppressed. I wonder when the last time was that this appeared in an advertisement for a parish opening.

This mantle of St. Martin reminds us of the centrality of both of these things in the ministry of Christ himself. It also reminds us that the church properly has those in it who need healing. Our society is haunted by a Norman-Rockwellesque notion that the normative state of all mankind is health and happiness while sickness (of all kinds) is an aberration.



St. Martin also founded many monasteries. As I have often said, it was the monasteries and their inhabitants who really brought Christianity to the rest of the world from its geographical beginnings. The monasteries put us on the side of learning from the very beginning. I suspect many modern churches which focus on the nuclear family, find monasticism at best quaint and at worst something aberrant to Christianity as they understand it. Without monasticism, the history of Christianity would be a very different and smaller thing.

Many of you commented on how you liked the portion of the Litany for the Saints we used as the intercessions last Sunday. It is worth noting that one of the reasons for the feast of All Saints, is to honor forgotten saints, those known to God alone. Although the saints we name in the litany are not exactly forgotten, they are not known to many modern Christians. At the 10 am. service I talked about whom the named saints were and the significance of their brief epitaphs. I will do that at all the services next time. It is understandable if you have some confusion about who is or isn’t a saint. The western church (Rome) has had a formal process for canonization for a long time. Since the reformation in England, the Anglican churches have no such formal process. Indeed, the Orthodox Church, arguably the most ancient of Christian churches, generally has no formal process for canonization, although certain saints who are generally already recognized as saints can be approved by the synod of bishops in a given Orthodox (autocephalous) national church. In the Episcopal Church we put people on the calendar by an act of the General Convention of the church. They are not exactly saints in each case but they are to be remembered for what they did for our church and society. To just honor the saints of old is to say that God is not at work in our present age. That of course, is heresy.

St. Martin of Tours by El Greco



Saints Paradise, De Civitate Dei, by French School

News from St. Luke's

We took a collection at all three of the weekend services for the ECW's Dress-a-Child program. As I said Sunday, I fervently wish there was no need to do this but there are more children in need than ever. We may differ about our explanation of this but I trust no one thinks children in America should go without necessary clothing. Thanks to those who already gave. We will collect again this next weekend.

The 4H group that is part of our youth group will meet this Wednesday at 5 pm. The youth group itself will start at 6 pm. Last week we ate soul cakes the rector baked from the published recipe. We listened to Sting's version of the song, "Soul Cakes" originally written (lyrics and music) by an English vicar in the 19th century (The Rev. M. P. Holme, Tattenhall, Cheshire).

The vestry budget committee is working on the proposed budget for next year. I would ask your prayers for that labor and for the health of the parish next year. Prayer is not ancillary to our Christian life but rather the fabric of it. A large part what I do as the priest at St. Luke's is to lead worship which is mostly prayer, seven times a week (three Eucharists on the weekend, one weekday Eucharist, two chapel services for the preschool and Compline Wednesday night).



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