

January 2015 Intercession Paper

My Dear Fellow Members of the Guild:

Let me begin first by thanking Father Allan Warren, a member of our Council and the Rector of the Church of the Advent, Boston, who was our host for the Annual Requiem in November. In addition to being a gracious and jovial host, he saw to every eventuality so that all went smoothly. (I might add that he has also been the most thoughtful, considerate and supportive of predecessors as he was my immediate predecessor here at Resurrection. I have been lucky in both respects, as my predecessor at S. Clement's, had also been my Rector during my second curacy, and was the very saintly Father Peter Laister.) Mr Mark Dwyer, the Organist and Choir Master, provided magnificent music that morning, featuring Victoria's Requiem for six voices, one of the greatest treasures of church polyphony. We were treated to a lovely luncheon downstairs, and then an organ recital on Advent's magnificent Aeolian-Skinner Organ (Opus 940, 1936) by David Enlow, my own Organist and Choir Master, who has become an internationally sought-after recitalist and of course has just recorded last year his fantastically successful recording of the vast majority of the organ works of César Franck. (Do remember that he is a Belgian, not French, just like Hercule Poirot!) Five members of the Church of the Advent were admitted as new members to its St John Baptist Branch, and one member of St Stephen's Branch at St Stephen's Providence, Rhode Island. The new branch secretary, Mr Christopher Laconi, was instrumental in recruiting these members, and will undoubtedly continue to place the Guild before the attention of his fellow parishioners. He was also a great help with the organ recital later in the afternoon. His last predecessor as Branch Secretary, Mr Carter George, had resigned as long ago as the 1990s, so the branch had languished slightly. I was delighted to open my safe to find a silver medal (the branch secretaries receive these) and find that the exact medal returned to me by Mr George when he resigned for health reasons was in an envelope marked in my own hand as being that for the Advent, Boston, so it was that one which Mr Laconi received. We try to keep these things organised in this way, as it is important (to my mind at least) that the medals and other accoutrements attached to particular branches stay with them. The branch itself, dedicated to St John Baptist, dates back to 1882 and was founded by no less than (the then) Father Charles Chapman Grafton, SSJE, who was Rector of the Church, before becoming Bishop of Fond du Lac. (Advent was of course then housed in the previous church building, on the flat of Beacon Hill, which was subsequently operated by SSJE as St John the Evangelist Church, and has recently closed. The current Advent building dates to 1894.)

It was no surprise to have exquisite music, no surprise that everything in the Requiem would be done "just so" in their own unique fashion, no surprise that

there would be an elegant luncheon, and no surprise that we would have the usual (touch wood) "GAS weather" which has been bright sunshine and moderate temperatures (for November) every year since the early 1980s! Of course, having said this, there will be a snowstorm next year!

I am afraid that the sermon this year, as two years ago in Boston, was not up to our usual standards, but I have printed it in this number of the Intercession Paper nonetheless at the request of a few who perhaps are somewhat deaf and missed how dreary it really was. We really must see to getting someone more competent to preach when we are next in Boston or people will begin to think there is a curse!

I am delighted to be able to announce that The Lord Bishop of Richborough, The Rt Rev'd Norman Banks, the President of the English Guild, will be with us for the Annual Requiem on Saturday, 14 November 2015, at the Church of the Resurrection, 115 East 74th Street, New York, the Guild's American Shrine Church, and my humble backstreet church. I have known His Lordship for about seven years, since the time when he was Vicar of the parish church at Walsingham, and I was preaching at the Shrine on the Feast of the Assumption 2007. He is a charming and deeply spiritual man, and in addition to his very important ministry as a flying bishop in the Richborough episcopal area, he takes his responsibilities as President of the English Guild very seriously. There, unlike here, the Guild owns the advowson of a great many livings, and has the power to appoint their vicars and rectors, a vital responsibility. The Bishop will be preaching at the Requiem and pontificating from the Throne, as I celebrate and other members of the Council act as Sacred Ministers. We are still cooking up what will be the musical offerings, but with the musical professionals my church is blessed with, I have no doubt they will be superb. Please mark this date now in your diaries or enter it in your electronic devices. We have chosen the date of the 14th, rather than the 7th, as it suited Bishop Banks better, but also between the many clergy who attend, the church musicians, and the very active laymen who are present, having the GAS Requiem during the same week as Christ the King, All Saints and All Souls, seems a work of supererogation even for the keenest of Anglo-Catholics! So the 14th it is, and the Council Meeting will be the night before, Friday, 13th November. I have in the past entertained the Council in one of my clubs: the Lotos or the Union League, and I imagine we shall do something of the like again. There will also be a luncheon served on Saturday after the Mass. We have tentatively scheduled the Annual Mass and Meeting for the following year on 12 November 2016, at All Saints' Church, Ashmont, in Boston, at the kind invitation of Father Michael Godderz, both the Rector of that wonderful church, and Master of the SSC in the Americas. His wonderful church, now being meticulously renovated and restored, will be on display by then in all her new glory!

The incumbents whose terms expired this year were all re-elected to their offices, including the Superior-General, the Warden, and the Secretary-General. We had one vacant, unexpired term, to fill, and were delighted that The Rev'd Canon Charles King SSC, a priest of the Diocese of Albany and a long-time member of the Guild, was prepared to accept election. As he is known to nearly all the Council, who like and admire him, this was a very welcome development.

It happens quite frequently, so much so that I am prepared for it now. An electronic message, one with a bit of an edge, arrived at my office computer on East 74th Street. It came from a priest in one of our most "advanced dioceses" in the Northeast who pride themselves on being in the fore-front of various movements in The Episcopal Church. Far be it from me to criticise or sit in judgement on these important and august dioceses, especially inasmuch as I myself would never, ever be found worthy to be involved in diocesan politics, nor have I any interest in them, having a small, but active church to run with very few staff members! Not only that, but I am afraid I am the last person who would be consulted as to what is new and *au courant* in such circles. The message had as its topic the suggestion that the Guild is an elitist institution, which restricts itself to beautiful services, outmoded prayers, and liturgical uses which are, to say the least, passé. As this happens occasionally, my response was ready. The first point is that we are hardly in any position to dictate to anyone what is done with regard to death and burial customs and liturgies in the Episcopal Church. We have no political affiliations and have never been involved in any of the "great questions of the day" which have occupied our church so consistently since the 1960s, that rather vexed decade. The Guild's humble office is instead to pray for the repose of the dead, especially at the Mass, and to try to make known to all the healing Sacraments instituted by Our Lord for healing, for preparation for death and for death and burial, that is to say, Extreme Unction, the Requiem Mass, prayers and Litanies for the Dead, and the correct and traditional methods of conducting funerals which have as their focus what we can do for the dead, not our fond memories of them, or our entertainment and temporary consolation at their funerals, which are most often called "celebrations of life" now, but which in fact can celebrate nothing, as their only message is that we are now deprived of the deceased. It is the Requiem Mass which points to our hope and theirs, which is a common bond amongst all Christians by virtue of our baptisms. It seemed that my interlocutor in this jeremiad was also deeply offended by suggestions I have made in the past that suggested that the Guild was "elitist" because it stressed liturgy, music and language in the service of the Truth in the Church. I am afraid I can make no apology for that, as it is not only one of my most deeply held beliefs but one which, I believe, is very important for the Church not only to teach but to cherish. It has been noticeably absent in the last forty or fifty years

and coincides with massive decline in attendance. (Can this be entirely a coincidence? Perhaps not.) The great poet John Keats (though not a great churchman!) made the famous comment in his *Ode to a Grecian Urn*:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty,
—that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Though Keats was not known for his piety or orthodoxy, he was certainly on to something with this observation. The only word we allow to stand in equation with God theologically is Love, as the Apostle St John frequently teaches. On the other hand, the distinguishing characteristic of orthodox doctrine, otherwise known as Catholic teaching, is that it is the Truth which matters, not our suppositions, or idle thoughts or opinions about God. The Truth is itself recognised as such by its fidelity to God's Word in Holy Writ and the established Tradition of the Church. This Tradition to which we refer is not just "we have always done it this way", but in fact the careful handing down of precious Truth from one generation to another in forms of actions rather than words. As a result, we have Truth in words in the Holy Scriptures and the Truth in deeds in Church Tradition. Church Tradition can even be said to be more important, as it was the Church itself which established the Canon of Scripture in the first place, as there were many disagreements as to which books should be included. We see therefore that Truth is important, but it is also very evident that as human beings with senses and emotions, that we are pointed toward the Truth by the expressions of God's gifts to the talented: Beauty. The Guild would never dare to place requirements on the musical offerings at our Mass. We would never dare to dictate to the preacher his text or conclusions. We would never dare to restrict ourselves to the grandest churches in the best neighbourhoods, or to the most sumptuous and gorgeous of vestments. All of these things have happened at Guild Masses in the past and undoubtedly will again, but they are not in and of themselves important. What *is* vital is that in each of these cases, those responsible are offering their **very best to God**. We do not bring to him the mediocre, the mundane, the quotidian, the boring, the dreary, the easy – this is a denial of who God is and who we are as his creatures. Instead we offer the very best we can, the special, the out-of-the-ordinary, the exciting, the scintillating and the difficult to achieve, and all because it challenges us to be more who God wishes us to be, and to use the talents to the fullest with which he has endowed us. All these things are harnessed in his service. In the magnificent poetry of one of my favourite hymns, we catch a glimpse of how this can be:

Angel voices, ever singing
Round Thy throne of light,
Angel harps, for ever ringing,

Rest not day nor night;
Thousands only live to bless Thee,
And confess Thee
Lord of might.

Thou who art beyond the farthest
Mortal eye can scan,
Can it be that Thou regardest
Songs of sinful man?
Can we feel that Thou art near us,
And wilt hear us?
Yes, we can.

Yea, we know Thy love rejoices
O'er each work of Thine;
Thou didst ears and hands and voices
For Thy praise combine;
Craftsman's art and music's measure
For Thy pleasure
Didst design.

Here, great God, to-day we offer
Of Thine own to Thee;
And for Thine acceptance proffer,
All unworthily,
Hearts and minds, and hands and voices,
In our choicest
Melody.

In our case, in the Guild, what we offer in this way is our prayer for the dead, our conversation in Love with God above those whom we love but see no longer, a conversation which he has promised us will avail them much.

We hope you will pray regularly for our Council Member Father Richard Cornish Martin, SSC, and for our former Councillor, Father Lane J. Davenport, Rector of the Church of the Ascension & St Agnes, Washington, D. C., both of whom are quite seriously ill. Prayer for healing for the sick is of course part of the Guild's regular ministry, and in this case, should be a priority owing to their service to the Guild, both over many years.

Let me end by reminding you that as members of the Guild you not only have duties and responsibilities (which naturally we expect that you are performing!), but also have privileges. In addition to being prayed for perpetually after your death, you may also enrol posthumously members of your family or dear friends who have died, or may ask the prayers of the Guild for the sick or the dead on just the one occasion. You may also contact the Shrine Church of the Guild, my own, by sending a letter, post card, by telephoning (212.879.4320) or by sending an electronic message to me at rector@resurrectionnyc.org We shall be happy to light a candle for you at the Guild's Shrine at Resurrection, for healing, for one of the dead, or for any concern you have.

Yours in the Holy Souls,

Canon Barry E. B. Swain, SSC

Superior-General