

GAS Letter for January 2017 Intercession Paper

Dear Fellow Members of the Guild:

Under the debt of hospitality, I must thank first of all Father Michael Godderz, SSC, and the wonderful people of All Saints' Church, Ashmont, in Boston, for being our hosts for the Annual Requiem Mass offered for those who had died since the last such occasion in my own church in November 2015. Of course, their Choir of Men and Boys is well known, and Mr Andrew Sheranian, Organist & Choir Master, showed them to good advantage. The church looks better than ever after its very lengthy and no doubt expensive renovation, and having been through manifold church building projects myself in all three of my churches, I am sure that I can empathise with Father Godderz in feeling that he is just now regaining his sanity! We were given a lovely luncheon after Mass, too, which rounded off a wonderful day. The Annual Mass is set for Saturday, 11 November 2017 at 11 a.m., at my own humble side-street church, the Church of the Resurrection, New York, our national shrine church.

Having last year been obliged to announce the deaths of Father Lane Davenport and Father Richard Martin, both of whom had long been Council Members, and the previous year of our beloved Warden, Father Ralph Walker, my assumption was that it would be awhile before I had to send out such news again. I was mistaken. On 26 May 2016, the Feast of Corpus Christi, occurred the death of our friend and Council Member, Father Frederick Shepherd Thomas Jr., SSC, the Rector of Grace & St Peter's Church, Baltimore. Father Thomas had been a member of our Council for some years and had enlivened its meetings with his wit and enriched them with his wisdom. Father had been Rector of Grace & St Peter's for thirty years at the time of his death, and was from 1977-1986 its curate. He had previously served his title at Mount Calvary Church in the same city, when it was still open, and was ordained and said his first mass there in December 1973. He was for many years an animating spirit and trustee of the Joseph Richey Hospice in Baltimore, which had been founded by the All Saints Sisters and Mount Calvary Church. The Guild had had its Annual Requiem at Grace & St Peter's many, many times over the years going back to about 1910, but Father Thomas was especially hospitable and welcoming, and we happily took advantage of his hospitality, friendship and welcome often during the 1980s and 1990s, and right up to the first decade and a half of this century. He was similarly welcoming to the Synods of the SSC, which met there in 2007 and 2012.

He was a graduate of The University of the South, and The General Seminary class of 1973. His always entertaining personality, lightness of spirit and sense of fun might have misled some to think he was not quite as serious and disciplined a priest as he was, and an assiduous pastor, very much living up to his second name. Father Thomas was 67 years old, and had had a few serious health challenges in the last few years, but this was nonetheless a swift-moving and deeply shocking end. He died fortified by the Rites of Holy Church, and his Requiem Mass was at Grace & St Peter's Church, on Saturday, 4 June. It was my privilege to have been asked to be the celebrant of the Mass and preacher, and I take the liberty of printing my sermon in this number of the *Intercession Paper*. Father Thomas had all the full traditional rites of the church, as we might expect, and his assistant clergy, musicians and parishioners all took their part in

this great spiritual work of mercy. The church was completely full to overflowing. We went afterwards straightaway to the grave, and an astonishing number of people accompanied his body there. I print in this number of the Intercession Paper a copy of the sermon I delivered on that day, which might interest a few of you, but as you see in it, I had strict instructions not to talk about him in it. I have no such burden here.

I do not hesitate to say that the entire day was extremely moving and difficult for all concerned, including me. One of the things I noticed though is how comforting the truth of the Catholic Faith is both in its teaching and its rituals which express that. Almost every act and word of the Requiem Mass, Absolution of the Body, and its burial, expressed that. Though I have done all those things hundreds of times in nearly thirty years as a priest, dozens of times for parishioners and others who were close personal friends, and quite a few times for brother priests, I don't think it had ever quite hit home so much just exactly how perfect those rites are. Every bleak moment, every moment in which grief seemed to overwhelm us, the liturgy and ceremonial propped us up. I have been asked often how a priest manages emotionally to bury people who were close to him. The answer of course is, sometimes we don't. But, as with actors, the show must go on, and we must find it within ourselves to carry on with it despite our own feelings. We have a job to do both for the dead and for the living, and we need to do it. Private grief and sadness comes later. But the other side of it is that it really is often surprisingly easy as long as we are engaged in the liturgy and ritual of the Church, and I believe it is because those things are of such supreme comfort and since they are the same for anyone (essentially) as they used to say in England from The King to the dustman, they remind us of God's love for his children, created in his own image. Having been told of such love in the rites and services, it is impossible not to trust that He will take them to himself. It is telling, I think, that I never have any trouble saying a funeral mass, even for those I have been very close to and fond of, as long as it is the words of the Sacred Liturgy, but once I must speak my own words, in the pulpit, it can become exceedingly difficult to retain one's composure.

A piece of official business was also occasioned by this news. It was my obligation to declare, in accordance with the By-Laws, that a vacancy existed on the Council owing to Father Thomas' death, and that said vacancy would be filled by the Council meeting at Boston, Massachusetts, on Friday, 11th November 2016 at five o'clock. Such notice was given in writing to the Council members in writing on the day after Father's death, and the Council has filled the vacancy as announced below. There was one year left in Father's unexpired term.

Obviously, as it is our *raison d'être*, we shall be praying for the happy repose of his soul that Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep will show mercy and that Our Lady will pour out her prayers. Just as obviously, Father Thomas was among those for whom we prayed at the Annual Requiem in Boston. His death leaves a technical and legal vacancy on the Council, which we have filled as I describe below, but it also leaves a moral, spiritual and emotional vacancy on the Council which cannot be filled in the same way. No one in the Guild must ever begrudge one of our friends and members going forward to the next stage in his or her pilgrimage to God, but, as Father Kunkel often said, God expects us to accept it and do what he has asked us to do in such circumstances, he does not require that we be happy about it. We are certainly not happy

about this loss, especially as it comes rather closely upon our loss of Fathers Walker, Davenport and Martin in the very recent past. But we are confident as we say, *Jesu mercy, Mary pray.*

In news of the Council, as I mentioned above, we had a one-year unexpired term to fill occasioned by Father Thomas' death, as well as a full three-year term which was occasioned by Father Warren Shoberg's decision not to stand for re-election. I certainly understand this, as Father lives at a very far remove from our meetings and it can be quite a burden in stamina and expense for many to make such long journeys annually. Father Shoberg has been an interested, conscientious and supportive Council Member, as well as an ever-gracious and loyal friend, and we certainly thank him for his service.

The Council had considered these matters in the months before the meeting in various conversations. To fill the unexpired term of Father Thomas, we have elected Mr Paul W. McKee, a parishioner of St Paul's, K Street, Washington, D.C. I have known Mr McKee since I went to S. Clement's about 1988, and he has served in almost every capacity at St Paul's, from washing up pots after a luncheon to vestryman, search committees, organ committees, building committees, lector, usher, server and so on. He was a great support and help to Father Daughtry, Father Martin and Father Sloane. He has also been a Council Member of the Society of Mary and of the Society of King Charles the Martyr, which gives us a further connection to those august bodies. I am very happy he has accepted our invitation.

The full three-year term occasioned by Father Shoberg's retirement has been taken by Father J. Peter Pham, Assistant at St Paul's, K Street, in Washington. Father Pham was my Sunday assistant here for some years when he lived in New York, and I was privileged to solemnise his marriage to his lovely wife, Soo, in 2007. He has been an academic off and on for many years, and has also worked with several diplomatic and foreign affairs concerns, both public and private. Father Pham was ordained priest in the Roman Catholic Church and served in it for some years, but was received into the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Quincy by Bishop Keith Ackerman. When that Diocese made its decision to affiliate with ACNA, Father Pham chose to stay in the Episcopal Church and stay on the staff of Resurrection, and is therefore now a priest of the Diocese of Chicago. He and Soo moved to Washington a few years ago (much to my chagrin!) and he supports and helps St Paul's when and however he is able, as an honorary member of the staff, holding a license to officiate in the Diocese of Washington.

As St Paul said to the Galatians, "Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you...", and so it is time to close. I send you my very best wishes for Advent and Christmastide, a time when, for many of us, the Holy Souls feel very close indeed through our memories and through the thin veil that separates us. I repeat my thanks to Father Godderz and the people of All Saints', Ashmont, and I hope that those of you who can will make plans to be with us for the next Annual Requiem at the Guild's National Shrine, The Church of the Resurrection, Park Avenue and East 74th Street, in New York, on Saturday, 11 November 2017 at 11.00 a.m. The front and back covers of this number of the *Intercession Paper* display our new Shrine of St Francis of Assisi, and our All Saints' Altar, a travelling baroque altar from 18th century Peru at Resurrection since the 1930s but in need of massive restoration which it has now received and is now being

used again for the purpose for which it was created three hundred years ago. These photographs should remind us of our mission, our existence and our identity. The photograph of a saint's shrine reminds us that the Church consists of countless multitudes who have fought the fight, run the race and have received the crown of gold that fadeth not away – they are with God forever. The All Saints Altar reminds us of the many who rejoice with us on another shore, still being prepared to be with God forever, but not in any way severed from us and whom we may succor with our prayers and the Holy Sacrifice, and also our own section of the Church, the Church Militant, which kneels before such altars the world over and attends the Holy Sacrifice and receives the Body and Blood of our Crucified Lord who, having trampled sin and death under his feet, rose again from the dead and reigns forever in Heaven.

Yours in the Holy Souls,

The Reverend Canon Barry E. B. Swain, SSC
Superior-General