

Dear Fellow Members of the Guild:

I must begin by thanking Father Andrew Sloane for his warm and generous hospitality to The Guild in November for our annual Council Meeting and the annual Requiem. We met on Friday, the 13th of November, and it was a great pleasure that so many members of the Council were able to be present, with regrets from only two. The Council entertained a number of matters including the usual housekeeping ones of minutes, financial reports and the like. We were happy to be able to make three grants for vestments, even in these days of diminished returns from our investments. Three new branches of the Guild have been established this year: at St Stephen's Providence, R. I. (St Stephen Protomartyr branch), at St John's, Newport, R. I., (St Nicholas Branch) and at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Danville, Illinois (branch yet to be named). Father Sloane then invited the Council to the Cosmos Club for a lovely dinner afterwards.

On Saturday morning, the annual Requiem was offered at St Paul's Church, K Street, in Washington. Father Frederick S. Thomas, SSC, a member of the Guild's Council and Rector of Grace & St Peter's Church, Baltimore, Maryland, was our preacher and reminded us of several truths about the Christian understanding of death. I was honoured to be invited to be the celebrant of the High Mass, and Father Sloane acted as Deacon, in order to keep me from disgracing myself too much! This awoke a very nice memory for me, as he and I were Sacred Ministers together weekly during my time first as seminarian assistant then as a member of the staff at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, 1983-1988. Father Sloane was then the Senior Curate there, before going to be Rector of Grace Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin; and then to St Paul's in 1997. St Paul's Branch of the Guild, under the dedication of St Michael the Archangel, is now the largest in the American Guild, and we were pleased to see some of their members at the Mass, together with others who had travelled quite a distance. Father Walker is always the Council Member who travels the furthest (from Denver), but the lay member of the Guild this year winning that prize came from Chicago. The Mass itself was lovely, and St Paul's looked particularly attractive. I admired very much their Requiem big six candlesticks, but was unfortunately unable to get them out of the church unobserved! Mr Robert McCormick and his choir offered the *Victoria Requiem*, for which we were most grateful.

Next year, we shall be making the journey to St John's Church, Newport, Rhode Island, where Father Trent Fraser SSC, a long-time member of the Guild, is now Rector. Their newly established branch of the Guild, dedicated to St Nicholas, will be our hosts. The Council will meet on Friday, 12 November at five o'clock, and the Annual Requiem will be Saturday, 13 November at eleven o'clock in the morning. We have had an unexpected pleasure in the promised presence of Father Robert Farmer, vicar of St Mary's, Wellingborough, Northants, in England, who is a member of the Guild's Council in England, and will be with us that day and preaching. We look forward to this very much. I have visited Father Farmer in his church, and he in mine, and the Bishop of Richborough and I have visited back and forth preaching at Guild venues, but this will be the first time that Father Farmer or any member of the English Guild's Council (other than the President) has visited an American Guild function.

Our next piece of good news is that the vacant seat on the Council has been filled by the election of Father Michael S. Godderz, SSC, Rector of All Saints' Church, Ashmont, in Boston. Father Godderz was a member of the Council some years ago, as some of you will recall, but asked to take some time off. We are delighted that he has consented to serve again with a new full term of three years.

Father Thomas, in his sermon, commented on a parishioner of Grace & St Peter's, who was breakfasting with fellow parishioners at an International House of Pancakes restaurant, then went out and got in his car, and was in a terrible traffic accident during which both he and one other parishioner lost their lives. Even in this terrible accident, which no one would wish on anyone, Father Thomas remarked that God was with them even in their very quick journey going from breakfast at the International House of Pancakes to Purgatory in just a few minutes. It is this sure and certain knowledge that sustains us in the face of violent deaths such as these, or senseless killing as we have just seen at Fort Hood Army Base in Texas, the deaths of young people from the H1N1 influenza virus, and always and everywhere the deaths of loved ones, which we feel we can scarcely even accept, much less understand. God is in all these deaths, as he is the ground of our being, the source of our hope, and the goal of our journey.

One of my predecessors, both as Rector of S. Clement's, Philadelphia, and as Superior-General of the Guild, wrote of a difficult interview with a

parishioner who was finding the spectre of death very difficult to deal with. Father Joiner tried several different angles to explain this and encourage him, giving him hope to deal with this impending fact. Eventually, God intervened and gave him a way. Father Joiner heard his dog scratching at his study door. The dog had woken and wanted to get in the study, and so was scratching. Father Joiner commented to his downcast parishioner, "Hear that scratching. It's my dear dog who wants so much to get in here. She has no idea what I'm doing in here, or who my guest is. She doesn't know what's going on in here or exactly what will greet her when she enters. She knows only one thing: that her Master is here, she longs to see Him, and she trusts him entirely. That is enough for her, and it must be enough for us when we contemplate the journey of death." I have often passed that observation along to people, and I find it almost always helps.

The other thing that always sticks in my mind is the night of Maundy Thursday. It is the night on which Our Lord Himself contemplates his own death. This death is not without fear for him, and we recall that even he asks God the Father to let this chalice pass from him, if it is possible that he need not drink from it. Unlike us, he could actually have turned away from the path of death, but did not, knowing that path would lead not only his own human body to God the Father through his Resurrection, but that it would also lead all of us to God the Father through the death and Resurrection of Our Lord, into which we have been baptised. In my church, the altar of repose on Maundy Thursday is along the west wall. As we sit in church for the High Mass of Maundy Thursday and think of his last night on earth, instituting the Blessed Sacrament, giving his Body and Blood to his disciples, instituting the Sacred Priesthood itself, and giving us the commandment of love, death is everywhere in the air. As we sit in church the next day on Good Friday, hearing his Passion according to John, venerating the Cross, the instrument of his shameful death but also of our salvation, and re-living that terrible day with him, something is behind us and beyond us, both literally and figuratively. Behind us and glimpsed on our way out on Good Friday, is the altar of repose. It is a little glimpse ahead to Easter, with its flowers and candles and the presence of the Risen Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Even in the darkest moments of the Maundy Thursday Mass and the Good Friday Mass of the Pre-Sanctified, even as we hear the terrible story of his arrest, trial and death, even as we leave a darkened, silent church with an empty tabernacle, its sad unbleached candles in their dull brass candlesticks, a

church on the one day it has no light burning before the tabernacle because it is empty, even on this day, the hint of Easter, of Risen Life, is there. As we turn to leave, we see before us the intimation of what is waiting. The Blessed Sacrament is no longer at this altar, It has been consumed, but the flowers are there, the candles that once burned before It are there, the silk frontal is there, the fair linen is there, and the votive candles lit by the faithful are there. It is as though all is in readiness for his Resurrection and, in fact, it is.

It is just the same with our lives here on earth. We live them through seeing what is before us, and acting often as though that is “real”. We know however that these are the mere accidents of life. The substance of life, what really matters, is the unseen life of God into which we are subsumed by the Sacraments we receive. That real life awaits us. We may not always see the glimpse of it, but it is there, just over the horizon, and as we pass on in our journey, through Purgatory and the Church Expectant, we know that at the end the goal is the Risen Life of Our Lord, and arriving there his children find not just flowers and candles and churchly signs of his hidden Presence, not just ways He comes to us, but the Trinity, God Himself, Three in One, and One in Three. It is this God who has made us, this God who has become one of us in the Incarnation, this God who sanctifies our whole lives, this God who loves us: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. So even as we sit in this life, which sometimes resembles the Good Friday church, we know that just over the horizon, just waiting for us is the Easter Church, which is Heaven itself.

Yours in the Holy Souls,

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