

GAS Letter January 2013

Dear Fellow Members of the Guild:

I should like to begin by thanking Father Michael Godderz, Rector of All Saints' Church, Ashmont, in the Dorchester section of Boston, for the warm and lovely welcome we received for our annual Requiem Mass in November. The Gentlemen and Boys of the Choir acquitted themselves beautifully offering Rheinberger's Requiem, which was a new piece to me, and a welcome discovery. Luncheon was served in their guild hall, which was a treat, and we are most grateful to those who fed and watered us. In order to heighten interest and give, as they say in real estate, added value to the day, we invited my own Organist, David Enlow, an internationally known and sought-out recitalist, to present a post-prandial organ recital. Though All Saints' organ has a very particular style, Mr Enlow was well able to wrangle it into submission and present a very appealing recital, for which we thank him. In all, God was glorified, the Sacrifice of the Mass was offered for the Holy Souls, and all those present were edified. We also had a lovely and warm sunny day. Of course, it is not possible for a New Yorker to suggest that he lives in anything other than the greatest city on Earth, and far be it from me to do so, but I have always found Boston most appealing, back to my "day pass" visits from school in the early 1970s (though it is a very different city to-day!).

We have had several changes to our Council on which I wish to report. First, Father Ralph Walker, for over fifteen years the Warden of the Guild, had asked not to be re-elected to that position this year, owing to continuing illness. Father Walker has retired as Rector of St Michael & All Angels Church in Denver, Colorado, and also as Master of the Society of the Holy Cross (SSC). He remains a member of the Council, and there is therefore no need to offer an encomium on his years of service as he remains very much in harness! Father Walker has been an exemplary, helpful, winsome and dedicated member of the Council, regularly every year being the member who has travelled the farthest to attend. I remember very well meeting Father Walker for the first time, when I was invited to a dinner party in the Rectory of the Church of St Mary the Virgin in Times Square, where I was seminarian assistant while at the General Seminary. Father Wells, whom I had the privilege to work for, invited me to "meet a priest from Colorado". I had never met *anyone* from Colorado before, and I knew nothing of this priest, but went along happily for a free meal, as any seminarian would! At that meeting, just months short of thirty years ago now, I met Father Walker. Of all the priests I had met before or since (and there have been a great many!), I have liked quite a few, respected quite a few, and, admittedly, had the combination of liking and respecting occur rather less frequently, but I have never been fonder of or respected any more than Father Ralph Walker. He is one of ten priests or so whom I have often tried to emulate and live up to, but never quite succeeded.

Elected Warden to succeed him is Father Richard Lutz, who is one of the other nine priests to whom I just alluded! I have known him just about as long, as he was a priest of my ordaining Diocese of Long Island, and a member of the Standing Committee when I was approved. A priest who belonged to the SSC with both of us said to me once, "If I were a layman, and had to imagine

the parish priest I would most like to have, it would be Father Lutz". That tribute was quite sincere from that priest, and I would absolutely agree. In retirement, Father Lutz is living in Bay Village, Ohio, and offers himself very liberally to a wonderful church he serves. I'm sure they value him just as much as we do!

We had three members of the Council to replace, one resigned earlier in the year owing to time pressures, one declined to stand for re-election, and one is retiring from the active ministry and returning to his native land. It was the Council's pleasure to elect Father Warren Shoberg, SSC, priest of the Diocese of South Dakota, who is now serving as interim Rector of St Michael & All Angels, Denver, and has been known to all of us on the Council for many years. He is a wonderful and dedicated priest with a sterling reputation which is entirely deserved. Our second new member is Father Martin Yost, SSC, Rector of St Stephen's Church, Sherman, Texas in the Diocese of Dallas. Father Yost was a layman at the Church of the Advent, Boston, and has been a member of the Guild for many years, as has Father Shoberg. Our third new member is Father Rob Hoppe, SSC, of St Agnes' Church, Algoma, and Precious Blood Church, Gardner, Wisconsin in the Diocese of Fond du Lac. Though that Diocese was once very involved in the Guild and its affairs and ministry, we have not had a member of it on the Council for some years, although Bishop Brady, Bishop Stevens and Dean Gulick were all among those in the past. We are very happy, therefore, that Father Hoppe, a very fine priest himself, has renewed in his person that connection.

The Council member retiring is Father Andrew Sloane, who is also retiring as Rector of St Paul's Church, K Street, in Washington. Father Sloane has been Rector of St Paul's since 1997 and a member of the Council for even longer than that, back to his time as Rector of Grace Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin. He is returning to his native England and will be living in London, working at St Paul's Knightsbridge, and therefore out of the American Guild's purview. This loss is one that will be felt not only in his parish, and certainly on the Guild's Council, but also to his Diocese and the American Church. Father Sloane, too, I have known for about thirty years, since my seminarian days and later when I joined the staff of St Mary's, where he had already been Curate for two years. Following nearly ten years' service there, he went to Grace Church, where his eight years as parish priest revolutionised that church and made it an example of what a small town church could be. I always enjoyed my visits there, for the lovely church, his gracious home and welcome, his charming parishioners, and the town of Sheboygan and the area around it, which I loved. His fifteen years in Washington have constituted a monumental contribution to the life of St Paul's, already an astonishingly vital and holy church, and now even more so. Mention of Father Sloane brings to three of that list of ten priests I mentioned earlier!

My own city has had rather a difficult past month, and the surrounding areas perhaps even more so. The hurricane which hit a few days before All Saints Day still two weeks later has left many cold and in the dark, and others with no homes at all. In addition to the misery caused by high winds and storm surge of the sea and Long Island Sound, there were some devastating fires, most notoriously the one at Breezy Point in the Rockaways in the Borough of Queens. Very sadly, many of those who lost their homes to that fire were themselves policemen and firemen who were working elsewhere actively saving the lives and property of others. Naturally, they are all very much

in our prayers here in New York, and I gather throughout the country. But the thing I find most interesting and indeed very moving, is how many (nearly all in fact), while lamenting their losses and finding them emotionally very hard to deal with, made the same comment. While they were devastated by what happened, they had their own lives and those of their family, and human life was so much more important than any possession. These disasters also bring out the best in so many people, and one is impressed and humbled by the selfless things that people have done for others even, in many cases, when they themselves were in similar or even worse circumstances.

Disasters of this kind concentrate the mind very closely on exactly what we do think is important as people and perhaps also as Christians. The corporal works of mercy, so called because they are works of mercy we perform for others, are very important. Feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned and burying the dead are all things that we intrinsically feel we need to do for our fellow man, and it is undoubtedly for that reason that so many world religions speak with one voice on these works. Though many disagree about how these works should be performed in our society (by government with charitable institutions or largely or even solely by charitable institutions), we all agree on their importance. This is far more the case than when the Guild was founded in 1873, and neither government nor most people in Victorian England thought it was their place to perform any of these works. It was left to the churches, and became a particular charism of Anglo-Catholicism to address these needs directly and efficiently. The slum ministries and all works which engaged the needy in a pastoral way (as opposed to the more prevalent debtors' prisons and workhouses), were a feature of Anglo-Catholicism not of the Church of England as a whole. It was the spiritual works of mercy that the church as a whole committed itself to.

The spiritual works of mercy: instructing the ignorant, counselling the doubtful, admonishing sinners, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offences willingly, comforting the afflicted and praying for the living and the dead, were all items on which the Church of England as a whole (apart from prayer for the dead) agreed. All Christians saw the importance of these spiritual works for themselves and for others, and all agreed that the Church of England should attach particular importance to them.

Oddly to-day, in the culture of Western Europe and North America, increasingly secular and disengaged from the practice of Christianity, it is the corporal works of mercy on which everyone agrees and which all value as of paramount importance. There is a kind of secular religion which centres itself around just this kind of thing: runs for breast cancer, marathons for various causes, help for inner city youth, Habitat for Humanity, and so on. Each and every one of these is a wonderful aim and a good thing for Christians to be doing as an expression of our faith, (and we rejoice that good people of all faiths, or none, engage in them), but they cannot, for us, become a *replacement* for the spiritual works of mercy. For the Christian, these spiritual works of mercy are just as important and in some ways more so. The corporal works of mercy can have effect only in this world, and therefore only for a period of time fixed by God Himself, whereas the spiritual works of mercy are eternal, as they continue to affect the dead long after they have departed this world. We have no clear idea exactly what the unseen kingdom of the waiting church, purgatory, is like,

though there is no scriptural warrant for believing that it is a kind of little hell with the same cast of characters and many of the same activities. Indeed, those ideas, stemming largely from Dante and Hieronymus Bosch for example, are largely the product of the creative minds of artists, not the divinely inspired Word of God. Our Lord tells us that he is preparing a place for us, and that there are many mansions in Heaven. While we must live as well as we can, according to God's Holy Word, and confess our sins, we may also trust that we have a reason to hope that God will treat us not with the justice that we deserve but with the mercy and love that are his special characteristics. His Sacred Heart burns with love for his children, not with indignation and vengeful fury for our sins. I well remember as a teenager in school being given Jonathan Edwards' sermon of 1741 *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* as an example of what the Puritans were all about. It is a horrifying piece of oratory, and even as a teenager reading it, I realised two things at once. It had nothing to do with the Anglican Christianity in which I was raised, and that if that was what the Christian God was like, I wanted nothing to do with Him.

So as Christians and members of our Guild, we must realise we have two sets of imperatives, both with great importance. There are corporal works of mercy to carry out both for those whom we love (friends, relations, fellow parishioners) and for strangers. There are also spiritual works of mercy in which we engage, and these also for both those categories. The corporal works of mercy we perform because it is the right thing to do, and Our Lord told us this to ensure that we are among the sheep and not the goats. The spiritual works of mercy we perform because they are of eternal importance as they concentrate on the eternal soul, and just as we engage to perform them for others (particularly for us for the dying and the dead), so we trust that others will do the same for us when we need this prayerful assistance. It is precisely this circle of love and prayer which unites the three parts of the Church: those of us still struggling, those being prepared by God to be with Him forever, and those who are at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, worshipping Him in his nearest presence forever.

Yours in the Holy Souls,

The Rev'd Canon Barry E. B. Swain,
Superior-General