

March 2024

Volume XI, Number 3

THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS

FOR THE BIRDS

BY THE VERY REV. CANON MICHAEL PENFIELD

In 2015, I moved from my home into a condominium. I was traveling a lot and not home much. Paying a gardener, a pool guy, and having an alarm system seemed excessive. It was time to simplify. With a condo, it is just lock and go. But I missed my yard, and specifically feeding the wildlife – the birds and the squirrels and, indirectly, the rats and the falcons. Even though I have a rather spacious patio at my condo, except for the hummingbirds, I resigned myself to being unable to feed others. Then in the summer of 2019, I was visited by two black-eyed juncos (also known as dark eyed juncos). For those of you who don't know, this bird is a little bigger than a chickadee, and like most birds in the west, without bright colors. It has no real distinguishing marks except for its black head.

But these two were amazing. These juncos would scrounge for seeds that blew into my patio from the sycamore trees or other plants without any fear of humans. My friend Cindy was amazed as they would come up to her and go around her feet without any regard. After talking with her, I resolved to start feeding them.

To my great pleasure I discovered I had very little cleanup

with them. They are very neat and very discreet when it comes to waste. Since then, their children and friends have come to eat. However, all the new ones are hesitant with us humans, though just as clean.

Eventually, about a year ago, the sparrows discovered the food. These guys are not very neat. Unlike the juncos, they spread the seed everywhere, selecting only the morsels they like. They also dominate when they come, letting no junco near the food until they are done. And then, last year, when I was leaving for a trip, at about 4 am, I went out into the porch and a rat scurried away. That was it! The rats had discovered the bird feed. And, like cockroaches, no condominium wants to be a home for rats. So, I tossed the seed, cleaned the deck and left for a long trip.

Now, what you may not know is that I pray my morning prayers looking out through my sliding glass doors onto this deck. As I pray, I am facing east and will see the sun rise, sometimes seeing the clouds taking on a pinkish glow like



The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.

a Maxfield Parrish mythic painting. It is a great way to meet and praise the Lord first thing.

Last week, as I was praying the Lord's prayer, two juncos perched on my patio wall as if to say, welcome back, now where is our seed! And as I looked at them, a thought came into my mind:

"For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." [Matthew 5:45b ESV]

As with all of you, I am quite familiar with this passage of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew. And, I always "understood" what was being said. However, for the first time it really struck me; it really made sense. And it made sense from the perspective of my juncos. I fed the juncos because they pleased me, but inadvertently, I also fed the messy sparrows and the very detestable rats. It was the same with my other home. I fed the birds' seed and the squirrels' peanuts, but I also ended up feeding the roof rats in the neighborhood who came to eat the seeds and nuts, and eventually the falcons that came swooping down to eat some of the birds.

The thought occurred to me that when one is generous, often it is impossible to be selective in our generosity. When God is generous with us, He blesses a whole swath of people; the just AND the unjust; the sinners AND the saints. He blesses societies quite often as a whole, not distinguishing those who "merit" blessings and those who do not – and I think most of us can figure out why. Sometimes, the only way to bless the ones you want is to bless many. The only way to feed the juncos is to feed all. And isn't that what God did when He sent His Son into the world? In order to save some, He had to offer salvation to all.

None of us have merited our salvation. We all are sinners. We all fail one time or another. Jesus, acting just like His Father, shed His blood to make sure ALL can be saved. The only thing that He asks is that we have faith in Him. That is why this passage of Saint Matthew's Gospel is so powerful. Not only does it foreshadow what Christ would do, it actually reveals God's reasoning.

And as I looked out on to my two companions on the wall, a light went on. Just like my gift of feed for my juncos could not be restricted to "just the right type of bird", God's salvation is not restricted. If I am going to feed my juncos, I better be prepared to feed the rather messy sparrows and the highly despised rats. That is what Jesus did. He gave His message to all, He gave it, not to those who were the highly regarded in ancient Judea, but also to the common person and even the shunned and hated sinners.

But something else struck me. Blessing

all, the sinners and the saints, is NOT something most of us would do. Knowing we had to clean up after the sparrows would cause some of us to stop feeding the juncos. And knowing we are feeding rats would cause many of us to stop feeding the juncos, as well. As humans, and me particularly as a former attorney, we are obsessed with justice. We want blessings only on the good; and we want punishment heaped on the bad. But God seems to act in a way foreign to us, heaping blessings on all. How really different is the Lord! And what is the message that these birds were bringing to me? Let's look at the full passage from St. Matthew's Gospel:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you', so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." [Matthew 5:43-48 ESV]

It is now clear from the lesson that my little juncos taught me that I must be open to all. I must feed all, and not worry about what is "just". I must forgive all, and not just the "saints". The blessing of the Gospel is for all – the "respectful, friendly, courteous" juncos, and the "brash, uncouth, unsophisticated" sparrows, as well as the "despised, despicable, dirty, undesirable" rats. The feed of the Gospel is for all and we are to spread it, regardless.

Loving is never easy. Each of us is drawn to certain types of people. And within that group, most of us only find a few that we truly love. But, loving our enemies is especially difficult. Yet we are commanded to do so. And the most loving thing we can do is show the love of God to all – a love that blesses the just and the unjust, and blesses the evil and the good. We must exude a generosity in our loving. We are to stop being selective and start being "permissive" and generous. And we must love all as God loves all.

God bless.



REQUEST FOR A BISHOP COADJUTOR

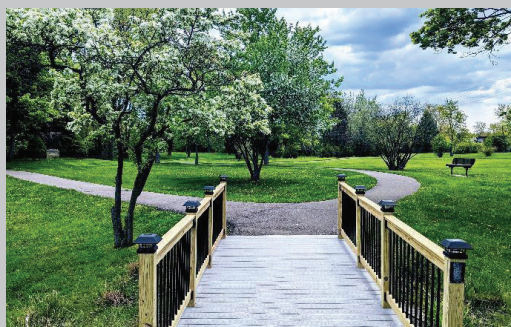
The Standing Committee for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints have closed nominations for our next Bishop Coadjutor. Since one of these men will be leading our Diocese in conjunction with our Bishop Ordinary, our other Bishops, our Vicars General and the rest of our Standing Committee, we ask for your prayers that the Holy Spirit will guide us in selecting the right man. I would ask that all our parishes, clergy and laity, pray that God will insure the correct man be selected for this very important job in keeping us within the One, True, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. To this end, Fr. Christopher Parrish of St. Luke's Chapel in the Hills has drafted the following prayer, which I hope will help you:

A Prayer for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints' Selection of a New Bishop Coadjutor

Almighty God, giver of every good gift. Look graciously upon Thy Holy Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a Bishop Coadjutor for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints that we may receive a faithful pastor who will preach the Gospel, care for Thy people, equip us for ministry, and lead us forth in fulfillment of the Great Commission: through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God bless,

Fr. Michael Penfield
Vicar General



Save the Dates!

The Missionary Diocese of All Saints General Synod April 2-5, 2024



St. Paul of the Cross Passionist Retreat Center

www.stpaulretreat.org

23333 Schoolcraft

Detroit, Michigan 48223

located 14 miles from airport (DTW)



Check-in Tuesday between 3-6 p.m. & depart Friday before noon

Home



By **The Right Reverend Winfield Mott**

My wife was raised on a Manitoba farm before the days of mechanization in those parts. Harry was the family's workhorse, in advanced years during Micki's childhood. But he still faithfully, if reluctantly, plodded out to work everyday, pulling the plow or the stoneboat, or, in winter, the cutter sled to take Micki and her brother to school in town. But when the chore was done and he could return home, his pace quickened, his mood brightened and he headed for home swiftly with cheerful anticipation.

Home has that meaning for us. It is one of the evocative terms in our language. It is like a salmon who swims the wide ocean for years, but is driven to return to her place of birth in a creek, with an inerrant memory to find that place, give birth to the next generation and then to die in the embrace of home. For humans, it can serve as a fixed point in an otherwise swirling life, where the parental home stands, where family inhabits the vicinity, with its familiar streets and landmarks, the school, the church, the familiar accents. For others, home has long ceased to be a fixed spot, but has ended up moving with them, like a nomad's tent. Yet, even returning to that more temporary location, they can feel the glow of the familiar and perhaps the presence of loved ones.

Humans will even fight and die for their homeland, cheer for the home team, be a booster for the hometown, care deeply about that place. "As fair as these green foreign hills may be, they are not the hills of home," as the Scottish soldiers song puts it.

Where is home for us, in this restless, rootless age? Modern times, even the current evening news, witness to enormous upheavals, whole populations driven from their homes, becoming refugees in unprecedented numbers. Those not victims of ethnic or political uprooting often find themselves forced (or lured) from home by economic devastation. Others fall victim to their own dreams, "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence," as in the case of the Prodigal Son.

"I am but a stranger here, heaven is my home," sings the old Gospel song. Perhaps. But when I see the New Testament descriptions of heaven (in Revelation, mainly), they sound awesome, but it feels stranger than what I know of anywhere on earth. An incarnational Faith on a planet with a solid material existence has given us a sense of home that has a place name attached, a firmly grounded piece of real estate, with well remembered sights, sounds and smells. The point of creating the Garden for humans was precisely to give us our home, a place of spiritual purity and material satisfaction and substance. Our tragic loss of that home, still remembered in the collective memory, leaves us as wandering refugees, instinctively seeking that Paradise lost, like the salmon seeking her native creek, but without her success.

Lent is the season of the church year which has its focus on this. Lent is the celebration and enactment of our journey home.

Expelled from the Garden because of our failure to accept and be content with God's perfect gift, we now live as pilgrims on a journey to the place where we belong but have yet to experience. Our unwillingness in multitudinous ways to live in obedient love with the perfect Father, preferring our own self-centered willful and rebellious pursuits, has consequences. The collateral damage is great, sin abounds. And home has been lost.

Lent has sometimes become a little lost itself. It is seen as a time of "giving up" something valuable in your life, of being geared to an unhappy state, a time of no rejoicing or celebrating. The main theme of Lent is the pilgrimage home to the Garden, the risen life in Christ. As with any journey, it requires planning and preparation. Since the loss of home is directly related to the failure of mankind to live in a harmonious loving relationship with God, the pilgrimage back to the embrace of God begins with an inward journey of careful and objective reflection, self-examination to discover and root out the interior obstacles to both giving and receiving love. If done honestly, this exercise invariably leads to repentance. A focus on the tools of Lent in themselves, such as fasting, cessation of social events and giving up treasured things, can be the terminus of the journey, never reaching the Paschal goal. It often appears that Christians have arrived at a condition of perpetual Lent, forever dour, joyless and austere, negative about the planet created in love which we inhabit.

But the pilgrimage does not end in repentance, nor even in the "amendment of life," which is its fruit. Repentance ends in forgiveness, absolution, if it is Christian repentance, directed at God. We are the Prodigal Son in Jesus' parable (Luke 15:11-32), miserable, self-centered, insensitive, unloving, disobedient. The consequences find us soon enough, and the Prodigal sheds bitter tears of repentance. But when he returns home, the forgiveness is instant and plenary. He has completed the pilgrimage and the celebration can begin. The goal of Lent is Easter joy. The process of Lent is through self-examination and repentance, using the tools of Lent. The story begins with the Prodigal's departure into willful sin, much like Adam and Eve, not with repentance. Some get no further than that, and are lost in a distant land. Others are driven by the consequences to repent (it is worth noting that, at first, it was the Prodigal's stomach which drove him, not his conscience).

The Elder Brother skips repentance and Lent, heading straight to self-righteous judgement of his brother, similar to the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector. He is also self-centered, insensitive, unloving and so disobedient that he will, in self-pity and anger, forego the banquet rather than join his Father in welcoming back the Prodigal. For the Prodigal, his sin ultimately produced a learning curve through disaster and shame, followed by repentance, amendment of life and forgiveness, to finally encounter the embrace of unconditional love by the Father. For the Elder Brother, being a better and more loyal son has



blinded him to his sins, as mentioned above. The story ends without telling us the Elder Brother's journey from there. We can only hope for him that somehow he realizes that he is loveless, and that is a crucial human failure. "O Lord, who has taught us that all our doings are nothing worth without love..." begins the Collect Prayer which immediately precedes Lent (Collect for Quinquagesima). Without discovering that truth, the Elder Brother's life will resemble that of many Christians, outwardly righteous, but loveless and angry, without joy or repentance, nor a way home.

"We forgo a profound opportunity when we view Lent as just another New Year's Resolution, a time for self-optimization rather than spiritual nourishment" (Delaney Coyne, in "America" magazine). The opportunity is to do the pilgrimage, to make the Lenten journey through self, suffering and sin by means of examination, prayer and all means of spiritual locomotion to arrive finally at home, which has been lost but can be found again, into the loving embrace of the Father and the joy of the welcoming banquet of perpetual Easter.



The Closing View

