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## Blessings and Blunders

The seasons of Christmas and Epiphany are filled with delight. But they are also invariably comical. Try as we might to conduct ourselves with accustomed dignity, we fall prey to various blunders. And when it comes to liturgy, we endeavor to do things "decently and in order" but often have miscues and mis-takes that leave a little smile on our faces, and some consternation.

One such blunder happened to Fr. Dunbar during Christmas. I asked him if I could repeat this story for you and he said, "By all means" or something to that effect.

As the season of Christmas has twelve days, the office is blessed with gracious gifts from parishioners for the church staff. An abundance of good food of all kinds is brought with good will and cheer. Well, one day Bill Rodgers brought a very special gift for Rence's sweet Lab, Boomer (of late memory), and my Shepherd, Odin. The gift consisted in a bag of dog biscuits that Bill and Cathy made out of whole wheat, pureed liver, olive oil and some such things. Our dogs love them.

Well, a bag of these dog biscuits was lying on the table in the workroom when Gavin happened upon them. Now there is one thing that you must know about the Vicar if you don't already. He takes the Church Year very seriously. When it is time to fast he fasts. When it is time to feast he feasts. Oops! Gavin was half way through the bag of dog biscuits when he walked into Rence's and Penny's office and said in a low whisper so that no one could hear (even though there was no one else there): "I think whoever made these cookies left out the sugar. They are not really very good." At which point he turned around, somewhat disappointed and unsatisfied, and returned to his office. Penny and Rence could not control their laughter, but they kept him in the dark until the next day, when all had been adequately digested. In the midst of all our Christmas joys this was a funny blunder which only added to our happiness.

The next was a little more serious. It was one of those liturgical blunders that everyone recognizes and which we plan to eliminate on the next go round. It happened before the Christmas Eve festival Eucharist.

The choir spent a number of weeks preparing for a performance of Handel's Messiah. The soloists had done a great deal of work, as had the choirmaster. But due to limits on time and availability, the whole

piece of choir and soloists had not been practiced together.

The performance was absolutely beautiful, and the place of that music before the celebration of the holy mysteries was a perfect preparation for Communion. The only problem was that the actual performance took twenty minutes longer than the allotted time! When the choir finally ended, there was a flurry of activity among members of the Chancel Society, the acolytes, and the clergy. And to make matters worse, when I began to chant, my voice, impeded by a cold, cracked like a country singer off-pitch.

The next morning, before our celebration of St. Stephen, I found a letter of apology and profound contrition on my desk. Brian, our choirmaster, had been mortified at the late start of the service and promised never to let that happen again. All in all the service was done beautifully, albeit blunderingly.

Another liturgical faux pas came at Evensong, at the very end. The choir had sung beautifully the entire day of Candle-mas. Evensong was a difficult service for the acolytes. They had to remember several different and unusual responsibilities such as lighting the candles through-out the nave and leading the procession around the church.

At the end of the service, after the final hymn, "Sing of Mary" had been sung in place, the acolytes proceeded to lead us, not down through the nave, but directly out the side! Fr. Dunbar quickly retrieved the conscientious but somewhat bewildered crucifer and we went our way rejoicing.

I wanted to recall these moments for you as a way of remembering how we sometimes mess up what we intend to do quite well, from enjoying the gifts of Christmas, to executing the liturgy of the church and the praise of Almighty God.

None of these was a devastating error, but blunders at various levels none the less.

When it comes to the liturgy, I never fail to remember the admonition of blessed William, which we heard so very often, "It's a not routine, it's Beethoven!" Still, the liturgy will never be the perfection for which we strive, until we see the Lord himself, face to face.

When it comes to living by the order of the Church Year, we can only laugh at our blunders of fasting and feasting, but then at the same time rejoice profoundly that our lives are formed in the Christian sanctification of time.

At the reception in the Parish House, after the Candlemas Evensong, I was deeply grateful and moved by how wonderful the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany have been at St. John's. With all of the chaos and confusion of the institutional church besetting our minds with anxiety and hearts with sorrow, the "worship of the Lord in the beauty of holiness" holds us fast. We continue, as we are, old-fashioned Episcopalians, under the authority of Scripture, formed by the Prayer Book, careful to receive and pass on the doctrines of Catholic Christianity.

We will not shrink from the duties of our inheritance. We may see

"through a glass darkly," but then we do see. We live out the Church Year, to borrow Plato's words, as "the moving image of eternity." But better still, we live as awaiting the Bridegroom, whose love is our every desire and delight.

**The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker**

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