

[send this](#)[bookmark](#)[print](#)[close](#)

The Parish Paper

OF
ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Vol.35 No.43

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Trinity XV) 09/19/04

The Church as Family

Whatever one might have thought of the content of Senator Zell Miller's speech to the Republican National Convention, only the most political zealot could disagree with how he began. As the basis for what followed in his passionate address, the senator from Georgia set forth a hierarchy of loyalty.

Although he is a life long Democrat, Miller spoke on behalf of the Republican candidate. Senator Miller's position, he contended, was ultimately for the sake of his children and grandchildren. He deemed that his own Democratic party has chosen a course contrary and injurious to what he intends for his family; and hence, he spit fire.

And so Senator Miller's hierarchy of loyalty was deeply felt and clearly expressed. It is the loyalty of love. The intentions for one's family come before, and inform, the intentions of one's political party. While we might disagree with what followed in his speech, I doubt that many of us would find fault with his priority of allegiance.

The dynamic of family and political party is analogous to our place in the current conflict of the Episcopal Church. As a Christian family, our primary loyalty is to Christ Jesus himself and to his Body which is the Holy Catholic Church. The Episcopal Church as a national institution comes second.

The hierarchy of loyalty is seen in the very being of the church. The faith we confess in the Creeds is not in ECUSA but in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The sacraments by which we live and pass on the very means of grace are not the General Convention's; they are Christ's. Bishops, priests, and deacons are not consecrated or ordained into the Episcopal Church. They are consecrated or ordained into the Body of Christ, the Church Catholic. Our institutional organization may be that of the Episcopal Church, our administration her Canons, but our identity, the essence of our participation in Christ does not derive from the organization of ECUSA.

In the present conflict one often hears the church conceived as family. And the overriding concern and effort is to keep the unity of the family. I want to be clear about this. These intentions are as they should be, and they should not be minimized. Our unity in Christ is nothing other than the very life we derive from him, as branches of the vine. Through him we are connected to one another. We are adopted children, by baptism, and incorporated into the mystical body of Christ

Jesus. His life flows through all of us.

And so this profound and glorious truth of the family as the Church Catholic, the body of Christ, carries with it its own hierarchy of loyalty, loyalty that proceeds from love. The first and highest level is to our Lord. Remember what he said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37, 38). And this also, "Who is my mother? And my brethren?...whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:48ff).

This love possesses an even higher and greater priority than that which Senator Miller espoused. Above and beyond the loyalty to one's natural family is the supreme loyalty to the Lord and through him to the Church Catholic, his Body, extended throughout space and time. He gave himself in love for his Body the Church, and we are called to love one another as he has loved us.

It is, therefore, a source of great sadness that some of our fellow churchmen defend the actions of the Episcopal Church by resorting to language of keeping the unity of the family. How does turning your back on one part of the family establish unity in another part? Then the church is not one but two, or more, parts, which is impossible. How can ECUSA say to the Anglican Communion and to the rest of the Christian Church, "We are autonomous, we are complete when it comes to charity" when charity is "the bond of peace and of all virtue" that unites the Church Catholic? The truth is, charity cannot be divided. ECUSA cannot remain within charity, if it is determined to stand without the Church Catholic. And this is what the House of Bishops in ECUSA has chosen to do by refusing the godly admonitions of the Primates.

Of course, the advocates for what ECUSA has done in New Hampshire claim that they are moved by the Spirit. As such, for them, God's love is now, as never before, truly expressed in same-sex relationships. But the truth is that they have confused human friendship with limitless appetite, and called it love. We can respect and admire every form of friendship, but it must not be used as an excuse for sexual license.

When it comes to the hierarchy of loyalty, the loyalty of love, we embrace the highest and supreme truth. We cleave to the unity of charity, and thus the Church Catholic, even when the current ECUSA does not.

And so we find ourselves with three consequences of our loyalty to charity. First, we are committed to following our Lord. We profess that we believe in the Catholic Church, we love her, and we participate through her in Him.

Secondly, all our loves in our natural family, our marriages, our friendships, are kept in the order of righteousness and true holiness because by grace we participate in Christ through his Church Catholic. Every rite of the Church is for the repair and restoration of love. And through the teaching and sacraments of the church, the souls of the faithful grow in true love by grace. We cannot allow ourselves to be diverted into schism through the moral aberrations and heretical

teachings of the General Convention and the House of Bishops. It is not enough merely to believe in Jesus. The devils believe, says St. James, and shudder. One may have a portion of faith, enough to move mountains, but without charity we are nothing.

And thirdly, we must always, always, pray for those of ECUSA, who have entered into schism by turning their back on the charity of the Church Catholic. We pray they shall repent and return. But at the same time this must be a hope that stems from love. There is no place among us for hatred or ill will. Our greatest desire ought to be for all Christians to live within the bonds of true love which is the unity of the Holy Ghost. That is my intention and desire, and I hope that it is yours.

But one thing remains certain. Just by claiming to be family does not make it so. ECUSA will return into full communion with the Anglican Communion when it repents of its present cause of division, and by resolving to live under the authority of Holy Scripture and by the wisdom of the Catholic Church, intends to reform her entire life in all matters of faith and practice. For this and all reform, for theirs and ours, we should pray and hope, and resolve by grace to do.

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

[send this](#)

[bookmark](#)

[print](#)

[close](#)

[Report Errors](#) | [Comments](#)

Copyright 2003 - 2004 St. John's Episcopal Church in Savannah, GA. All rights reserved.