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The Second Sunday in Lent

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THE LOGIC OF LENT - 3

On this Sunday, as on the last two, the gospel shows us Christ in conflict with demons, which are "the "enemies" mentioned in today's collect. In answer to our prayer to God to "stretch forth the right hand of his Majesty to be our defense" against them, Christ casts out a demon in today's gospel lesson "by the finger of God". He vindicates himself against the diabolical calumnies of his human enemies – Satan does not cast out Satan, only the Holy Spirit can drive out evil spirits - and draws the corollary: the soul set free from the lies of the devil must be filled with the Word of truth, lest it fall back into illusions, "and the last state of that man be worse than the first". Therefore, "blessed are they that hear the word of God" – the word that sets us free from Satan's lies – "and keep it" in faithful obedience. The epistle lesson makes the practical application: "ye were once darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light". Which is to say the word of forgiveness that sets us free requires of us the amendment of our lives. Relapsing into darkness is not an option.

The motif of Jesus' confrontation with his enemies and vindication against them acquires perspective in the story of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37-50). Moved by murderous envy and anger, they sold him into slavery into Egypt, and told his father that his son was dead. Joseph's eventual exaltation, and his use of authority to save his family, fore-shadows the saving death and resurrection of Christ.

CHAPEL RENOVATION

One of Fr. Ralston's most instructive Parish Papers was the one in which he announced that the pews in the Church were being replaced. There was a lot to be said in favour of this project. Our old pews, though handsome, are not well designed for kneeling, and their length leaves little room for passage. Yet, despite Fr. Ralston's announcement, the old pews were not replaced. Since Fr. Ralston was a man of strong mind, one can only surmise that his parishioners provided him with rather...compelling persuasions. The lesson I draw: don't mess with the pews!

Now that the chapel renovation is – at long last – nearing completion, you will see that I am not following that lesson altogether. But first a comment on what you will find, when you have an opportunity to visit it (as I hope you will soon). We have been able to raise the ceiling a bit and have adorned it with very handsome wood coffering. The altar has been dignified with a simple reredos and tester (or canopy). With help

from Mr. Brian Culver, we have installed a beautiful oak floor. As a result, the chapel now has much more architectural character, and feels more like the church. It also has better acoustics (the old wall-to-wall carpeting was an acoustic sponge that made even good voices sound feeble). Next to be installed are dark metal sconces, and brackets (patterned after the beams in the church) to "support" the ceiling beams. When there is no fear of dust, the tapestry and paintings will be hung, and the Moller pipe organ re-installed. When money permits, I hope sooner rather than later, we will add two chandeliers specially designed for the chapel in dark metal with a fleur-de-lis pattern, as well some carpet to protect the heavily trafficked areas of the floor - a pavement rug before the altar and a runner down the central passage. (If anyone would like to help us with these projects, please speak to me.)

While we await these finishing touches, we have brought back the old chapel pews, but - at least for the time being - in a different configuration, turned to face each other rather than the altar. This is the traditional arrangement found in chancel choirs and college and school chapels, and until the 19th century was also used in some parish churches. The layout encourages the corporate antiphonal recitation of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" which is at the heart of traditional Anglican prayer, while preserving the centrality of the altar.

This experiment is worth our patient consideration, because our chapel, like many other early 20th century churches, had more and longer pews than it needed. The result was that the chapel always looked empty, even when there were a good number of worshippers present, and at the same time rather cluttered (as does any room with too much furniture). Moreover there was little room left for passage, a problem especially when a casket was brought into the chapel for a funeral. Moving the pews back and turning them to face one another in the fashion of a choir or college chapel exposes more of the gleaming new wood floor, makes the whole room look more spacious, renders the altar (and its beautiful needlework hassocks) more visible, and makes the space more fitting for weddings, funerals, baptisms, and other services. (Naturally, this configuration will require kneeling benches for the two pews it exposes.)

For those used to prayer facing the altar, this may be a big change (although speaking from years of experience in a college chapel I found that difficulty disappeared quickly, as it does for singers in the parish choir). After consideration, we may wish to restore at least part of the former configuration. For the time being, however, I would be grateful if you would consider the possibilities as well as the problems of the pew arrangement, and let me know what you think. After we have spent some time in consideration, we will be ready to make a long-term decision.

The Rev'd Gavin G. Dunbar

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