

The Epiphany Star



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Fr William Parker

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Carolyn M. LaMountain, Editor

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE EPIPHANY
6605 Atlantic Avenue, Ventnor, NJ 08406

Dear Holy People & Friends of Epiphany:

I know there are several in our parish for whom this summer has been a great trial, and I assure you that we are all holding you in our prayers. For most, I hope this month of August can be a time of relaxation and renewal as we all enjoy the privilege of living in the Ventnor area.

Many people had commented on how much they enjoyed the sermon preached at the Institution on June 15 by the Rev. Dr. Richard Smiraglia, so I thought in this issue, I would reprint that sermon with his permission.

Merging Your Stories

[Romans 12:1] "I appeal to you therefore ... to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Last summer I got trapped in an elevator in Mexico City. I hate elevators. And at the time I was not so sure about Mexico City. I was there as a guest speaker at the City University. With great fanfare they had put me up in a hotel about halfway between the university and the center of the city. It was a hotel that had seen better times but now was under new management. Every day when I came back from the conference I had to make a trip to the desk to have my key-card re-made for some reason. And one particularly hot day after way too many conference sessions I popped into the elevator to go back to my room. It was tiny, about the size of your average pulpit. And there were already two big burly Mexican guys in there. But they smiled and I got in and we pushed our floors and then the doors closed and all the power went out. At first it was just frustrating so the other guys were laughing as I madly pushed buttons. When nothing happened I found the bell and pushed it until it made a lot of noise. Finally a voice from outside said "Momentito." And then somebody did something and we dropped from the lobby to the bottom of the shaft—boom! Now nobody was talking. And now I was sweating bullets. And one of my trapped friends noticed and spoke to me in English to say "you are nervous?" Nice. "Si" I said. So I rang the bell some more. After a

minute or two we started inching upward, sort of like a car being cranked up on a jack to change the tire. And then all of a sudden the doors popped open—still no power. But we all piled out into a dark empty basement. The guys seemed to know the drill and they forced a window open so we could crawl out and climb up the hill back to the lobby. Where the bellman was ushering a new guest into the same elevator to go to her room! I said no thank you! Later that night trying to read in my room I noticed that the lights flickered on and off. So in retrospect, the power there must come and go, and the other guys must have known what was happening. So that explains why they thought it was humorous and I thought it was terrifying. (That, and my claustrophobia—fear of enclosed spaces.)

Like most people I love a good story. When I have downtime (mostly in summer) I love to read fiction, mysteries often, because I genuinely come to be fond of the characters in the stories. When I finish a book I am always a little bit sad, like when a vacation ends, because now I have to go back to life without my friends. Stories are important because they reveal truths that otherwise might remain hidden. If we can get inside a story we can begin to experience the same emotions and the same changes as the people in the story. Like the story I just told you, which gave you the opportunity to be either scared or amused. This is why stories are such an important part of religion, and why we understand our Bible to be not a cookbook or even a user's manual, but a *revelation*—the unpeeling of outer layers of meaning that reveal the inner truth about God and humankind. And that truth is this, that the connection between God and humankind is as inexplicable as it is ineluctable, as unbreakable as it is unimaginable, and as eternal as it is imminent.

That was a whole string of theological terms. I mean, the connection between you and me and God is permanent, unbreakable, has always been and always will be. But the connection between you and me and God is hard to explain, difficult to imagine, and yet it is so common that it is taking place in every moment of life. God, you see, is in everything you are and everything you do, and you are in everything that God

is. That means that you are as essential for creation as any other person or thing. God, you see, is in every breath you take and always has been and always will be and yet this action, this love of God is eternal which means that you have always been a part of God and you always will be a part of God.

How are we to deal with this confusing reality? My sister in law always asks me “what about pigeons and cockroaches?” And I have to admit that even they seem to have an eternal part in creation. Well the answer is that we just do have to deal with this reality— that we and God are all mixed up together and that is how it is that it seems that God is doing weird things one day and everything makes sense the next. So the hard part is to understand, and especially to understand well. Because we who are here all know, that somehow God is important. And yet we as humans are really reluctant to let God be God, to give God God’s due. We want to think we are in charge and that we have created this world.

Joshua was Moses’ lieutenant on that long exile for forty years of wandering in the desert. And when Moses died, Joshua inherited his leadership. As God sent Joshua out to lead his people into the promised land God said to Joshua that he must be strong and courageous. But God also said that Joshua must meditate on God’s word night and day. God wants us to do that you know. God wants us to walk through every day in every moment absolutely and completely aware of God, in every moment in tune with God, and in every moment rejoicing with God. And so God also said to Joshua not to be frightened because God is with him always.

These themes echo through the rest of the scripture we have just heard as well. The Psalmist describes the power of God as light and truth and indeed when I am done Father Bill will vow to seek enlightenment and truth with which to lead this parish. God’s very own power is ours to use if only we can tap into it directly and do so without human guile. In the Gospel Jesus says that he does not call his disciples servants because, by believing in him, they have become friends—*intimate friends* it says in the Greek—meaning they have become a part of him and he has become a part of them. You and I are connected to each other and to God through Jesus, if only we can believe, and if only we can see the way.

In the letter to the Romans Paul says that we must give God our selves in full— every part of us— in constant worship; that our worship of God must be constant and eternal and spiritual. And so this means that we must understand how we are a part of God’s story and how God is a part of our story. And we must constantly tell these stories to each other in order to give constant praise to God for our place in God’s story.

We are here this afternoon to celebrate the merging of stories. You of The Church of the Epiphany have chosen to merge your stories, and your collective story, with the story of William Parker priest. I am here

because by God’s hand William Parker and I have stories that have merged in several places. The institutional church has blessed your mutual decision to share your stories and given its blessing on making your new story a part of its own. And in this way we continue to intertwine our lives as the children of God, the heirs of God’s kingdom. We continue to peel back the onion skin to see how it is that we all are connected not only to one another but most importantly—together with one another and with God. And that is the job God has given you. God has called you not only to join together with Father Parker, but also to join together your stories the better to reveal God’s will for all of you.

Sometimes it will be difficult. You will feel like you are trapped in an elevator and falling to the bottom of the shaft. When that happens, those of you who know it is an everyday occurrence need to speak up. And then you need to see that the power stops failing. Sometimes you will be thrown together in a tight space in an unwelcome and unusual way. God has called you to do that so that you will continue to peel back the layers until you understand how common your experience is.

And one more thing: Jesus says that God will provide, whatever you need, as long as you ask in Jesus’ name. So my friends, it is my privilege to stand here now, it is with God’s grace that I tell you a tiny bit of my story and that I begin the narration of your story together with Father Parker. It is with the power of God, which is light and truth, that I remind you that God has given you everything you need. And it is with the love of God, which is the glue that binds us all eternally together, that I ask you to continually present your selves, body and soul, to God as worship.

Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Richard P. Smiraglia is a priest of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, where he serves as Missioner among the Gay & Lesbian Community and assisting priest at The Church of the Holy Trinity, Rittenhouse Square. He is also Convenor of the Episcopal Coalition for Gay & Lesbian Outreach, an inter-parish mission movement devoted to finding new ways to carry the Gospel to the GLBT community through inclusive witness. ECGLO includes parishes from the dioceses of Pennsylvania and Delaware. Father Smiraglia is an experienced spiritual director, leader of spiritual retreats for the GLBT community, and a columnist on spiritual issues for the *Philadelphia Gay News*.

Fr. Bill and Fr. Richard met as students at The General Theological Seminary in New York City in 1994.



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Music & Lyrics By . . .

In the Church calendar, all months are festival months, but August strikes me as especially rich in this regard. This has everything to do with my subjective reaction to the saints we celebrate in August. We celebrate the Blessed Virgin herself on two consecutive Fridays. The sixth commemorates our Lord's transfiguration. In a darker figure, we mark the beheading of John the Baptist on the twenty-ninth, but on the twenty-eighth we remember Augustine of Hippo (don't forget to share in St. Augustine's feast of title on this date. The folks at St. Augustine's really appreciate our attendance.) Joseph of Arimathea's feast is on the first; we remember Oswald, martyr and king of Northumbria on the fifth and the French saint, Dominic, on the eighth. The eleventh is the feast of Clare, St. Francis's close friend, and on the twentieth we celebrate Bernard of Clairvaux, another French saint.

I could go on, but these will suffice to make a point I've made more than once, that we are indeed surrounded by those who have gone before us. We are members of a very rich community united in *agape* love. Remember the story of Elisha at Dothan? Arising one morning, Elisha's servant discovered the town was surrounded by the Syrian army. "We are doomed, sir," he told his master, "What shall we do?" Elisha prayed that God would open his servant's eyes, and suddenly the young man "saw the hillside covered with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." Horses and chariots of fire are great, but I'll settle for saints and angels. Even when we feel alone in our struggles to be faithful, we are not alone. That's some comfort to me.

This month's lectionary readings continue the stories of the patriarchs. Since we experience each lesson as separate from the others by a full week, we may not notice that they are in a sense part of a single narrative. The lectionary is recounting for us the record of God's interactions with the men and women through whom salvation was ultimately accomplished. These people were anything but perfect in their faithfulness—Joseph's brothers nearly murdered him after all. No, God was faithful first and reckoned even the least stirrings of gratitude as "righteousness."

The *Corpus Christi* plays about which I'm supposed to be an expert tell some of these same stories. The plays focus on what I've called the "through-line of Redemption" in my writings. As I've already suggested, the lectionary has perhaps a similar concern. Yet the lectionary selections may point in a slightly different direction. The *Corpus Christi* plays were concerned with the redemption of the entire human race through Jesus Christ. Of course,

ultimately our lectionary readings are too. Yet implicit, I think, in the readings is the sense that salvation is an ongoing action through God's minute-by-minute presence in each of our lives. Yes, Jacob is saved, as we are, through Christ's death and resurrection. But he is also **being** saved as he wrestles with God and is re-named Israel. Relationship again (another point I've made before)! What, after all, do the Death and Resurrection accomplish? The goal of Atonement is the restoration of relationship.

Do you find yourself wrestling with God daily? If you're like me, you're more apt to be saying, "God, where are you?" If this is you, I recommend for your reading Brother Lawrence's little book *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Brother Lawrence worked as a cook in the kitchen of his monastery, yet he used the mundane activities of stirring pots and kneading dough to maintain moment by moment contact with God.

I've not been nearly as successful as Brother Lawrence at recognizing God's continued presence in my life. Yet this humble monk's experience has certainly helped me

Cheers,
Jim Cramer

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Beach Masses are on! And will continue on Saturday, August 2 & 9 at 6pm at Sufflok Ave. and the Boardwalk. Come out and support this outreach effort to the greater beach community as we witness to the love of God revealed in the Eucharist!

The Rector's Forum (a.k.a. Adult Christian Formation) has been cancelled until further notice. Attendance at these sessions has been very low. I would appreciate any suggestions as to how to make this a better attended education opportunity. *Fr. Bill*

From Where I Stand.....

Well, the summer is zooming along and things are happening fast and furious. The Dinner and a Movie outreach is doing quite well. Our second showing had 42 people in attendance, several of them new faces. We are at the stage where we are able to break into "teams" which will allow us to alternate weeks of service instead of everyone being there at the same time. Surprisingly, the work is not difficult at all and cleanup us very simple. If anyone is interested in joining our team, please contact me and we will get you a slot. I am continually grateful for all those who have worked so hard to get this program up and running.

I am also excited about our upcoming "Beach Masses". Your Sunday bulletin contains all the information you need to be a part of another outreach ministry of Epiphany. Do tell your friends and neighbors of the dates. All you need is a bathing suit and a chair!

By the time this edition of the STAR is on the stands, I will have returned from my annual convocation with the Brothers of St. Gregory.

I am really looking toward this time away as it will afford me time and space to reflect on what God has in store for me in retirement. I will be entering a program at Cooper Hospital in Camden for CPE. CPE is a training and educational program to entitle those who called to do chaplains work in hospital and home settings. Since I feel called to work in Hospice areas, this training is necessary. As I understand it now, the program will be one day a week at Cooper and will run from September until December of this year. Upon completion I will be qualified to do chaplains work in Hospice. I ask your prayers as I enter this path of my journey.

Speaking of retirement, so far, it has been an eye-opening experience for me. I have not stopped since I retired on June 27th. I already am thinking of retiring from retirement. I do see some clearing of time down the road but for right now, I'm exhausted.

So, enjoy what is left of the summer. Take time to smell the roses. Don't forget Epiphany as you laze in this lovely summer season.

Faithfully,

Br. Robert James, B.S.T.

July Vestry Highlights

Pledges received for July - \$4,966.00

Budgeted Pledges - \$5,259.58

Total Revenues for July \$9,490.89

Total Expenditures for July - \$11,681.90

Father Parker advised that the Bible Study group did not meet in June. They will be meeting the last two Sundays in July and the first two Sundays in August.

A Wine Tasting Party will be held on August 21st at Epiphany.

The Flea Market realized a profit of \$1,158.00.

The Rector's Forum is being reviewed for a program in the Fall.

Father Parker reported that the Interfaith Group will be meeting on July 23rd

Permits have been applied for and the Beach Mass will be held in Ventnor on Saturday evenings at 6:00 pm.

A second calendar has been purchased and will be posted in the Parish Hall. All activities will be on the calendar in the future.

Edith Danson, Clerk

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August Birthdays

- 4 Kefnngth Schloesser
- 16 Carol Romano
- 19 Emily McKenna Bardo
- 20 Gloria Weiss
- 26 Robert Carty, Jr.
- 28 Elizabeth Glaspey
- 29 Sarah Ringz



August Anniversaries

- 22 Daniel & Barbara Slattery