

September 28, 2007

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

As I've mentioned several times, I'm writing a blog titled, *A Concord Pastor Comments*. "Blog" is short for "Web Log" and is a home page on the Internet for an individual to post comments, musings, reflections and news. You will find my blog at **ConcordPastor.blogspot.com** – and I hope you will check it out. (You can also link to my blog from the parish website.) I know that not everyone is online and I've told you that I will occasionally offer you here some of the items from my blog. Thus, this letter is comprised of five items I've published on the web already. Each post on my blog includes a full-color graphic and since some posts are dependent on viewing the graphic, I'm not able to duplicate those here. Other posts include video. For example, I posted a series of eleven videos of musical performances of the *Ave Maria*, leading up to our recent concert, *Chosen From All Women*. Perhaps the following sampler of posts will tease you visiting *A Concord Pastor Comments*.

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming

St. Vincent de Paul

September 27 on the church calendar is the memorial of St. Vincent de Paul.

Born in 1580 in Gascony, Vincent was ordained a priest in 1600 and won renown for his work with the poor. The story is told of his capture by pirates and enslavement in Tunis and his subsequent escape. In Rome he came to the attention of Pope Paul V, who sent him on a mission to the French court of Henry IV, where Vincent remained as chaplain to the queen. His activism, and the holiness of his life brought about the revival of French Catholicism. He inspired many of the court to an interest in the poor of Paris and was the founder of organized charity in France. In 1625 he founded an order of secular priests to work in rural areas; it became the Congregation of the Mission, called Vincentians. With these priests, St. Vincent conducted retreats, founded seminaries, and achieved widespread reform among the French clergy. For city work he founded the Sisters of Charity. St. Vincent's influence, through his spirit and through his institutions, is incalculable. He died in 1660 and was canonized in 1737.

You may be familiar with this saint's name through the work of *St. Vincent de Paul Societies* in many parishes, including Holy Family in Concord. A SVdP Society is composed of parishioners who serve the poor locally. Any city or town, including our own, includes those whose needs are great even if unknown to neighbors. A distinguishing feature of the Society's work is that they visit and establish relationships with those they serve.

Any pastor is grateful for such ministry as am I for the work done by our own SVdP Society. Their work depends on the generosity of others. The poor boxes at the church doors support this work. If you would like to offer your financial support, send a check made out to the St. Vincent de Paul Society to the parish office. Pray today for our parish SVdP Society and for the people they serve. St. Vincent de Paul, pray for us! (*posted September 27, 2007 on ConcordPastor.blogspot.com*)

Communion

The word *schism* is one you seldom see in headlines. In fact, most talk of schism preceded the printing press and the era of headlines. But today's *Boston Globe* carries just such a head on its front page - above the fold:

Episcopal leaders act to avert schism.

The Episcopal bishops of the United States, attempting to head off a schism over gay rights and biblical interpretation, yesterday promised to "exercise restraint" by not approving more gay bishops and not authorizing a formal ritual for blessing same-sex couples.

The pledge, part of an eight-point statement issued in the final minutes of a six-day meeting in New Orleans, reduces the likelihood that the Episcopal Church will be ousted from the 77 million-member global Anglican Communion, according to many US church officials. Only one of the approximately 160 bishops in attendance could be heard voting against the measure, although several of the most conservative bishops had left the meeting Friday.

"I think it lessens the possibility of schism," said Bishop M. Thomas Shaw of Massachusetts. "I think this is going to meet the needs of the archbishop of Canterbury, and it shows how much we want to be part of the Anglican Communion."

The presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, Katharine Jefferts Schori, referred to the statement as a clarification of positions already articulated by the US bishops, but said she hopes that "our sacrificial actions and united actions" will help stave off schism...

In the statement, the bishops not only agreed to a moratorium on approving gay bishops and rites of blessing, but also criticized actions by Anglican bishops from the developing world who have agreed to oversee conservative American clergy and congregations...

The bishops also said, "we call for unequivocal and active commitment to the civil rights, safety and dignity of gay and lesbian persons..."

The American bishops issued their statement under extreme pressure from within the Episcopal Church, which dozens of parishes and thousands of individuals have left because they are upset about the church's liberal direction. Pressure has also come from elsewhere in the global Anglican Communion, particularly from the developing world, where several leaders say they are reluctant to continue belonging to the same denominational family as a church that is affirming of same-sex relationships.

-*Boston Globe* 9/26/07

The issues threatening schism in the Anglican Communion are several but certainly chief among them are questions of biblical interpretation, especially as related to acceptance of same-sex relationships. My purpose here is not to delve into those hot-button topics but rather to observe in the midst of such controversy the Anglicans' desire to maintain *communion* internationally in their provinces and dioceses.

(It might be helpful to point out that while *communion* here includes sharing communion in the Lord's Supper at his table, it has a broader application in reference to the unity and integrity of the Anglican Church and its relationship to the See of Canterbury in the Church of England, and thus the Archbishop of Canterbury in whose person and ministry is found the unique focus of Anglican unity.)

While those on both sides of these intensely debated questions maintain their theologically differing positions, both also recognize that there is a reality to be safeguarded above and beyond the particulars of what divides them and that is their *communion* as church.

Although the Roman Catholic Church does not find itself on the eve of schism, we should recognize that there are many issues tracing lines of division within Roman Catholicism, especially in the dioceses and parishes of the United States. Again, my purpose here is not to rehearse those issues or divisions but rather to raise the question of *communion* in Catholicism. (As above, the word *communion* here is not exclusive of sacramental communion but refers to that broader sense of *communion* that is ours as we relate to the See of Rome and thus to the Bishop of Rome in whose person and ministry is found the unique focus of our unity.)

As I have written before, there is in American Roman Catholicism a growing self-understanding of congregationalism. I say this not in any to impugn those churches which proudly identify themselves as congregational but rather to point out that *communion* as understood in Roman Catholicism values unity of the many over the authority of the local congregation.

That the body of Christ be one was the prayer of Jesus at supper on the night before he died: *I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.* (John 17:20-23) This is precisely the kind of *communion* or unity at stake in these theological debates.

It would be a scandal and a shame for the Anglicans' "call for unequivocal and active commitment to the civil rights, safety and dignity of gay and lesbian persons" to be muted or lost in this struggle. And it would be a greater shame if the unity of Christ's body in the Anglican Communion be further splintered over a theological disagreement. My prayer is that the Anglicans find ways to continue to struggle constructively with their disagreements and at the same time maintain or, better, nourish the communion that binds them and which they treasure.

We Roman Catholics, especially the American variety, would do well to watch what happens in the Anglican Church and to work at understanding how deeply they value the *communion* that is theirs. While the structure of the Roman Catholic makes the threat of schism much less likely than for our Anglican brothers and sisters (their bishops already enjoying far more autonomy than RC bishops), we are in great need of understanding, safeguarding and working for the deepening of *communion* within our own Church. (posted September 26, 2007 on **ConcordPastor.blogspot.com**)

Out, damned spot! Out, I say!

So, this is the point I've reached in my life.

Getting ready to go out to eat a few nights ago, I put on a fresh shirt and as I buttoned it I noticed an ink stain in the corner of the pocket. It was smaller than the size of a dime - but there it was. And this was a shirt fresh from the cleaners so I knew this stain had staying power and while it might eventually fade some, its shadow would be with me for a while. I unbuttoned the shirt and took it off and as I did I became aware of how much of that shirt was in perfect shape. There was just that little stain...

After less than a minute's deliberation, I decided that most of the shirt was still worth wearing and although I wished the inkblot could have been in the shirt's armpit, I put it back on. And I went out to eat. And I had a nice meal. And I came home again without ever having given a second thought to that stain.

There was a time when I would have thrown that shirt away on the spot, without a second thought... So, this is the point I have reached in my life: I can wear a shirt with a stained pocket and not worry about it. It's a good thing to have arrived in this place.

In searching for the graphic for this post, I came across a hint from a guy who, when he has a similar stain, just puts a pen in the pocket and waits for folks not to advise him of the stain but to warn him about the problem of a leaky pen. It seems in men's fashion, leaky pens are more acceptable than stained shirt pockets. A leaky pen is a forgivable offense.

But I'm not going to put a pen in the pocket next time I wear that shirt. I might even wear it with the black pants I had on when I slipped in church and slid on my knee across the hardwood floor, "burning" a quarter size sheen into the material. I've been wearing those pants for over a year so I guess advancing to the stained pocket level was inevitable.

Why is it that we think of a small stain on an otherwise fine piece of clothing as a reason not to wear that garment anymore - even as a reason to discard it? Why are we so impatient with such a small imperfection in an otherwise fine shirt or pair of pants, a dress or blouse, a skirt or tie?

Then again, we're sometimes like that with each other, aren't we? The smallest imperfections in others may blind us to the worth of the whole person, our eye constantly drawn to the stain, the fault, the quirk - as if that's all there was to be known.

Now that I'm wearing this shirt and these pants, perhaps I'll find myself less focused on the imperfections of others. I hope so. Perhaps these old clothes will make more of a man of me. Then, in my stained shirt and floor-burned pants, perhaps I'll really be dressed for success. (posted September 24, 2007 on ConcordPastor.blogspot.com)

Marcel Marceau, R.I.P.

When Marcel Marceau died Saturday at 84, with him died *Bip the Clown*: the silent, white-faced stage persona of the man internationally recognized as the face of mime. What may also have died, or at least lost its greatest proponent, is the modern flowering of an art form that stretches back through the Italian Renaissance to its roots in ancient Greece. "He was the living embodiment of a long tradition," said Gideon Lester, acting artistic director of the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, where Mr. Marceau last performed in 2004. "And I can't imagine anyone following him." *Boston Globe*, 9/24/07)

The rest of Louise Kennedy's *Boston Globe* report on the death of Marcel Marceau offers more words about the life of an artist whose professional words were rare - actually, only one! To hear that one word and to see his "walking in the wind," watch this scene from Mel Brooks' *Silent Movie*. [On my blog there is a link here to video] I wonder if Gideon Lester was aware of the neat pun in his comment, "He was the living embodiment of a long tradition." Marcel Marceau taught us all about body language long before anyone had ever heard that term.

They say he "brought poetry to silence..." Certainly, he told stories without words and painted pictures with only the brush of his own body on the canvas of our imagination. By comparison, our own gestures and movements seem clumsy and inarticulate and perhaps that's why we are drawn into a mime's performance, by our longing to move and speak with equal grace and simplicity.

St. Francis wrote, "Preach the gospel always. If necessary, use words." As clumsy as may be our gestures of care and compassion, they can eloquently embody the long tradition of the Word who speaks still, silently, in our hearts. (posted September 24, 2007 on ConcordPastor.blogspot.com)

God, grant me the serenity...

I was at a meeting today which included several artists. The conversation centered on the restoration of a particular piece of sculpture. I was grateful that the artists spoke in terms that helped me easily understand the process they were describing. I learned a lot!

One of the artists, a man I only met today, was one of the most peaceful human beings I've ever met. His manner was easy, his speech gently paced and his body language completely relaxed. The way he engaged and interacted with others had a kind of simple reverence about it. When the meeting was over and he had left, I said to a friend, "I would be happy if, for one day, I had the serenity that man must have in his heart."

Have you ever found yourself in the presence of such a person?

I'm not one who sees or believes in "auras" but something about this man made it a genuine blessing to be in his presence.

(posted September 11, 2007 on ConcordPastor.blogspot.com)



The following is **NOT** from my blog but is **URGENT!**

We still **need teachers** for our religious education program for the following grades and days:

	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Grade 1	OK	OK	OK
Grade 2	OK	2	1
Grade 3	1	1	1
Grade 4	2	OK	2
Grade 5	2	OK	1
Grade 6	2		
Grade 7	3		
Grade 8	OK		

We also need someone to do **childcare** for our **teachers** on **Thursday**.

We are offering two options for **Teacher Training** for teachers for Grades 1-8 on:
Tuesday, October 2: at 10:00 a.m. -and - at 7:00 p.m. at Monument Hall

*If you can help with any of these positions, please contact us immediately
and plan to attend a teacher training meeting on Tuesday of this week.*

Classes start the following week and we are doing all we can to prepare teachers for a successful year.