

The Elizabethan



The Newsletter of St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church Burien, Washington

May 2018

From Fr. John: “The love of Christ must come before all else.”

This month we complete the Great 50 Days of Pascha, the Easter season, and then we celebrate Whitsunday, the Day of Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday. Mid-week feast days include the Feast of Saints Philip and James, the Ascension and the Visitation.

This abundance of celebrations can be confusing to non-liturgical folks or others who think that the Catholic side of the house requires intercessors while only the Protestant expressions of Christianity allow direct prayer to God or to Jesus. This is an unfortunate misunderstanding. As AngloCatholics, we avail ourselves of the communion of saints to join us in our prayer and to pray on our behalf. But we do so as a way to remain focused on and in relationship with the center of that communion. And there is a reminder in the ancient Rule of St. Benedict; the monastic guide that is at the roots of our way of being Christian in the world.

There are a number of phrases in the Rule that are spiritual gems. If one of these phrase could summarize Benedictine spirituality, it is this: “The love of Christ must come before all else.” The ancient and flexible Benedictine way is pervaded with the idea of sacramental encounter with Christ, in liturgy and office, in nature and material objects, in the circumstances of daily life, and above all, in ourselves and in others. Versions of this phrase are expressed in three different places in the Rule.

Another expression of this point comes at the end of Benedict’s Rule in a chapter about love or “good monastic zeal.” “Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ.” (RB 72). It is a quote from St. Cyprian, an early church father, whose quote continues to say “...for He has preferred nothing to us.” This is just one of several excellent passages in the Rule for meditation.

This Christ-love is the center of the Rule and Benedict expects it to be the center of the monastic’s life, which means it does well as the center of any Episcopalian’s life. As such, it is the most fruitful focal point for all our actions and thoughts and prayers. The whole of the Rule is marked by its high Christology, emphasizing the divinity of Christ without neglecting the human nature of Jesus. This mystery is compelling for more than monks and nuns, and is especially appealing to Anglicans who want to develop their relationship with the mystery of Christ in their own daily lives.

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Perhaps most compelling is St. Benedict's sense of the presence of the Risen Christ, making the Paschal mystery that we celebrate this month a cornerstone in Benedictine spirituality and, consequently, of Anglican spirituality. Benedict repeatedly presents the risen, transcendent Lord and calls us to participate in the Paschal mystery; to share in Christ's relationship with the Father and Spirit — the Trinity that we will celebrate later this month. It is God in Whom we are loved and in Whom we love others. It is this love that is to motivate all monastic behavior and, by extension, all Anglican behavior.

For Benedict, this means that all other realities in the life of monastics must be subordinate to their passionate, personal and communal pursuit of immersion in Christ. Abbot Michael Casey once wrote: "Separation from the world is not primarily an act of distancing or detachment, but an act of joining oneself to Christ and to the holy community. No Christian can scorn the world for which Christ died; he can however refuse to accept its unevangelical standards of behavior."

It is this dynamic Christ-centeredness that prepares our hearts and souls for a liberating journey into the fullness of life. After seeking and discovering Christ in ourselves and ourselves in Christ, we are enabled, through the Holy Spirit whom we celebrate at Pentecost, to reach out to others in love and in service. This Christ-love allows us to value and cherish the interests of others without sacrificing our own distinctiveness and precious solitude. The resulting emphasis on patience, kindness, humility, tolerance, forgiveness and trust create community within the body of Christ, animated by the love of Christ.

Let me leave you with a paraphrase of something the prolific Trappist Fr. Thomas Merton once wrote: "The poet enters into himself in order to create. The contemplative enters into Christ in order to be created."

Why we do what we do: Why do some Christians cross themselves?

When Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox and even some Lutherans cross themselves, it is a physical form of prayer. When clergy make the sign of the cross over other people or objects, it is a form of blessing. The gesture goes back as early as the third century C.E., but was rejected by some parts of the Reformation church and does not show up in many Protestant churches.

In the Anglican Church, the sign reminds us that we have been baptized—marked as Christ's own forever—and so it can be used almost anytime, but most often in the context of prayer. In fact, there is a stoup (a small font) just to the left of the main doors into the nave at St. Elizabeth that holds holy water so that people may dip their fingers in the water when entering or leaving the sanctuary. People who use it cross themselves as a reminder of their baptism covenant and vocation. But there are additional meanings associated with the sign of the cross in our liturgy.

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Grants for community garden

St. Elizabeth is building a food garden along the south side of the nave using organic growing methods. We will be planting and harvesting with some of the immigrant families of the preschool children in the two classes taught by Neighborhood House currently leasing space downstairs.

Most of the families live in our surrounding neighborhood. We want them to be able to grow food for their cuisine and tables as is possible in our climate and growing conditions.

As you may already know, we received a generous grant from the Les Dames d'Escoffier Seattle Green Tables committee last year. And more recently, we received an even more generous grant from the King Conservation District.

With these two grants and a bit of our own sweat, we will be installing an attractive black-powder coated chain link fence along the length of the bulkhead wall, taking care of our primary concern for safety. We will dig a trench so that a plumber can bring in water supply and a frost-free irrigation head. Then KCD will supply five galvanized stock tanks for planting as well as more than enough compost and garden mix, and we will begin planting!

There are some smaller nearby beds that could be planted as well., including one area that our Junior Warden, Carolyn Terry, plans to turn into a pollinator garden, with some counsel from Brian Sellers-Petersen, a gardening expert and beekeeper who was recently appointed by our Bishop to the new position of Missioner for Agrarian Ministry for the diocese.

We will give any food raised and not used by Neighborhood House families to our emergency food pantry, to local food banks or to our own parishioners in need.

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The Elizabethan is published monthly by St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church. The deadline for articles is the fourth Friday of each month.

Articles, calendar items and ideas may be mailed or emailed to the addresses below or left in *The Elizabethan* box in the Parish Office.

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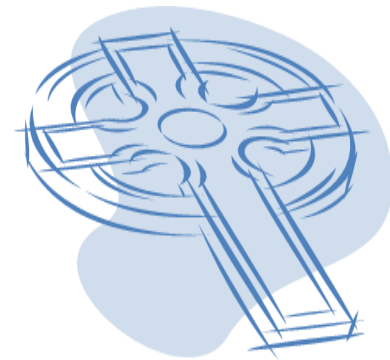
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At the beginning of the liturgy, the priest and many parishioners cross themselves at the opening acclamation as a way to enter into the mystery by which God reconstitutes the church as the Body of Christ. You will also see many people make the “small sign of the cross” just before the proclamation of the Gospel. Just before proclaiming the Gospel, as the priest or deacon traces three small crosses over the Gospel book, many people will use their right thumb to trace three small crosses—one over the forehead, one over the lips and one over the heart. Some also whisper or pray silently the words, “May Christ’s words be on my mind, on my lips, and in my heart.”

At the prayer of absolution after confession, or at the blessing at the end of the Mass, many Episcopalians cross themselves as a response to the priest’s action of blessing almost as if tattooing on their bodies the blessing, forgiveness or restoration to baptismal unity that God is granting. Some also cross themselves at the end of the Nicene Creed or in the Prayers of the People when we pray for the dead, or when the bread and wine are elevated at the sound of the bell during the Eucharistic prayer.

Many liturgical Christians cross themselves at the Sanctus in the Eucharist when we chant or pray “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” The phrase comes from First Temple Judaism and was prayed when the Temple priest emerged from the veil separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the building. The priest came bearing the Name of G*d strapped to his arm or his forehead and sprinkled the Temple with the blood of a goat that represented G*d.

The people cheering Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem used the phrase to hail Jesus as their soon to be new king, and Jesus told the people that they would use the phrase again after he had risen. By tracing the image of the cross on their own bodies, Christians remind themselves of the Divine and human blood that Jesus gave in his crucifixion, and also to acknowledge the coming of the real presence of Christ in the blessed bread and wine.

In each version of the Great Thanksgiving, there is a prayer for the blessing of the bread and wine. Each Eucharistic Prayer also provides a petition for God to sanctify all those who will be receiving. This is an especially appropriate moment for making the sign of the cross because we offer our entire bodies, minds and souls—our very lives—along with the bread, wine and alms to make our offering literally “the gifts of the people.” Many Episcopalians also cross themselves at communion just before receiving the bread and taking the cup as an act of reverence for the Real Presence of Christ.

I invite you to consider these forms and moments of physical, silent prayer if you do not already use them. They are certainly not required, but many people find them to be enhancing. And as always, I am delighted to answer any questions you may have about this or any of our practices, or I will learn more with you if I don’t have an answer!

Mailing address and email distribution

A few reminders: If you have mail to send, please use the P.O. Box 66579. If you send mail to the street address, the Post Office will return it to you.

Also, if you would prefer to receive this newsletter electronically, please send us your email address. Alternatively, you can download it from the website: <https://stelizabethburien.org/> Or you can pick up a copy in the narthex when you come to church.

Our thanks to those of you who have contacted us to say that you'd prefer to receive this newsletter by email or by downloading. You always have the option to change your mind!

For everyone else, we will continue to print and mail a paper copy unless and until you tell us to do otherwise. Whether you can physically get into St. Elizabeth or not, you are a part of this parish so please do stay in touch. And thanks for your support!

Fellowship opportunities

On the first Friday of each month, from 10am to 12noon, you are invited to come for coffee and conversation in the St John room. Volunteers are signing up to make the coffee and bring treats. If you are interested, Janey Montgomery has put up a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board across from the library.

We hope this can be a forum for parishioners to get more acquainted with each other in small groups outside our worship together as a larger congregation. The next scheduled dates are May 4, June 1 and July 6.

"Dinner for Six" gatherings are already underway, but if you are not currently in a group and would like to participate, please let Janey Montgomery know at janeymontgomery68@gmail.com. New groups are hosting dinners through May and each dinner concludes with a version of Compline from the Book of Common Prayer. Sign up to come and get to know more people at St. Elizabeth!

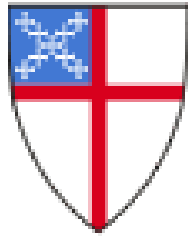


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“Only those who value above all else the dignity of human beings as human beings are in agreement with the God who created humanity in God’s own image and likeness and who is no respecter of persons.” ~ Fr. Albert Nolan, O.P.

Adult Formation:

On Tuesday, April 17, April 24, May 1 and May 8, Fr. John Fergusson will be presenting a series of classes about the significance, meaning and mystery of the Sacrament of Baptism as well as Confirmation and the Catechumenate. On the scheduled Tuesdays, both a 3:00PM and a 7:00PM session of each day’s class will be held. All are invited to attend!

Adult Formation classes on Sunday morning (9:00—9:30 a.m.) will return on May 6th. We will gather in the St. John Room to talk about the Oxford Movement, a pivotal period in Anglican history with roots in early Christianity that gave Episcopalians and other Anglicans, among other things, options to embrace ancient forms of worship and prayer practices, affirm the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and to venerate Mary the Mother of God, all while staying within Anglican tradition.