

## True Religion

About 3 1/2 years ago, I took a plane down to Georgia to visit my Mother, who was 85 at the time. I went to visit so I could tell her that she needed to sign up with Hospice because her cancer had returned and all the doctors told her, me, and my sister that it was so severe, so widespread through her body that treatments would not stop it; treatments might be worse than living with it; and, she might have 3 or 4 months to live.

Even though she had heard her doctors, whom she trusted, tell her this, she didn't accept it; mostly, because 5 years earlier, when first diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer, they gave her little chance to live more than a year with aggressive therapy. She underwent surgery and aggressive therapy, and was cured and very healthy for almost 5 years. She was able to celebrate her grandchildren's weddings and the birth of great grandchildren.

My Mother didn't listen to me and did not sign up for Hospice care that January of 2014. I knew if my Sister talked with her, if we both visited at the same time, she might be willing to accept going under Hospice care... so I went down there a couple of weeks later, and together with my sister, we convinced my Mom, and got her all signed up, and her Hospice nurse began regular visits. My Mom died 8 weeks later at home, at peace, surrounded by those she loved. She had a good 8 weeks, a holy death!

I think of this now, when I read the story of Jesus telling the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, confront the authorities, suffer, die, and experience resurrection. I think about my own experience with my Mom because no one ever wants to hear about suffering and dying. No wonder Peter said, "*God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you...*"

What I find so amazing is that this Gospel is joined with one of St. Paul's greatest encouragements in Chapter 12 of his letter to the Romans --- more than 20 specific instructions about what it means to live a Christian life. Jesus going to Jerusalem shows us the way. Paul writing to the Romans gives concrete instructions.

And both of these most important Biblical lessons are appointed with the collect for this week where we pray to "increase in us true religion". There should be no debate about what "true religion" is. It is confronting evil and suffering. It is knowing the power of God's love and the hope for eternal life. It is following every one of Paul's instructions.

Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1533 to 1555, reworked several ancient prayers from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century Church when he composed the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549. For today's collect, he added this phrase to an ancient prayer: "increase in us true religion".

We think we live in turbulent times! Cranmer had to deal with King Henry VIII for 11 years before Henry died. He was able to reform the English Church and issue the first two Books of Common Prayer in 1549 and 1552 when young Edward was King. But King Edward died and when Queen Mary came to the throne, she and her Roman sympathizers arrested Cranmer, stripped him of his Ordination and duties, and executed him by burning him at the stake, just 7 years after the first Book of Common Prayer was issued! We live in a much different world!

Yet we still seek to know what "true religion" is. We still seek to understand life, death, suffering, eternity. We still hope to understand God's call to us.

If today's lessons from Romans and Matthew don't speak to you, let me suggest two other possible guides to "true religion". Our music director, Richard Newman, is far more than a musician. He's a man of deep faith and very sound theology. I rarely change any of the hymns he's selected for us to sing on a Sunday. Take the verses of the 5 hymns Richard picked for today. They speak of "true religion".

And second, study, read, reflect up on the September Grace Notes, our parish newsletter. I was so moved by every article and the diverse range of ministry our parish celebrates. Stories of mission, of pilgrimage, of summer at Shrine Mont, of La Gracia, of silent prayer, of novels, even something about fishing! I don't think I'm exaggerating too much, when I suggest that at Grace Church we know, we practice "true religion".

Romans 12:9-21

Matthew 16:21-28

HYMN 477 All praise to thee, for thou, O King divine

HYMN 707 Take my life, and let it be

HYMN 10 New every morning is the love

HYMN 606 Where true charity and love dwell

HYMN 484 Praise the Lord through every nation

*Engleberg*

*Hollingside*

*Kedron*

*Ubi caritas*

*Wachet auf*