

HOLY TRINITY ANGLICAN CHURCH METCALFE, ON.
JANUARY 16, 2022
Feast of the Confession of Peter
Reverend Michael Fleming

Fr. Michael: As we begin our celebration of the moment when Peter confessed that Jesus was Lord, we acknowledge that our parish sits on the unceded territory of the Ashanabee Algonquin people.

People: **May we share the land which God has given us with respect, reconciliation and hope.**

Fr. Michael: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

People: **And also with you.**

Fr. Michael: Lord God, illuminate our path by the light of Christ who moves us and leads us. Guide us to discover a small manger in our hearts where a great light still sleeps. Creator of light, we thank you for the gift of that unfading Star, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour whom Peter recognized and confessed this day. Heal our divisions and draw us closer to the Light that we may find our unity in Him who lives and reigns with you and the Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen

Holy God, this week we remember The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr's struggle for equality, justice and dignity for his people that inspired so many other reform movements that seek to highlight the plight of the oppressed in society. We pray that those in civic and religious authority be reminded that we all have been created in your image and that there is an intrinsic dignity in each of us that calls for uplifting every man, woman and child.

We pray that your Holy Spirit will remind us all that you show no partiality with regards to nationality, race, ethnicity or gender, and to do so is to go against your great commandment of love towards one another. We pray that the Church will not be complicit of injustice by being silent, but that it can and must rise up with a prophetic voice that speaks truth to power and advocates for the values of your Kingdom. We pray these things in the name of the Blessed Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen

Almighty God, you inspired Simon Peter, first among the apostles, to confess Jesus as Messiah and Son of the living God. Keep your Church throughout the world steadfast upon this rock of our faith so that in unity and in peace we may proclaim the one truth and follow the One Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Spirit now and always. Amen

Reader: A Reading from The Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:8-13)

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them:

“Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

Jesus is “‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

The Word of the Lord

People: **Thanks be to God**

People: **Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are ready to forgive and accept any one who will trust and believe in you, by this wonderful miracle that you have made possible through the lives of Peter and John – that wherever a heart in emptiness and loneliness, in pain and in despair cries out to you and asks you to enter their life and live with them, that you come and dwell with them always. Amen**

Fr. Michael: Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

People: **He makes me lie down in green pastures, and leads me beside still waters.**

He revives my soul and guides me along right pathways for his name's sake.

People: **Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me.

You have anointed my head with oil; and my cup is running over.

People: **Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

Reader: A Reading from the First Letter of Peter (1 Peter 5:1-4)

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

The Word of the Lord

People: **Thanks be to God**

People: **Loving God, you care for each of us and you care for others. People and things on this earth sometimes let me down. When this happens, I offer you all my cares and concerns for you are the one worthy of praise. Take care of me, Lord and help me to take care of others. Amen** (from Daily Prayer Guide)

Holy Gospel

Fr. Michael: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Fr. Michael: The Holy Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ according to the blessed St. Matthew (St. Matthew 16: 13-19)

People: **Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Fr. Michael: The Gospel of Christ.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

Homily - Trifecta

Quite often, a particular Sunday sees the celebration of two events which happen on either that day or shortly before or thereafter. Today, there are three events which we honour all at the same time: Martin Luther King Jr Day on Monday and the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and the Confession of St. Peter on Wednesday. It now becomes a challenge to wed all three moments together. As I began what I thought would be a daunting task, I discovered two quotes which have made the writing of this homily so much easier.

The First is this: "They tell me that in America you have within Protestantism more than two hundred and fifty six denominations. The tragedy is not so much that you have such a multiplicity of denominations, but that most of them are warring against each other with a claim to absolute truth. The narrow sectarianism is destroying the Body of Christ. You must come to see that God is neither a Baptist nor a Methodist. He is neither a Presbyterian nor an Episcopalian. God is bigger than all of our denominations." The second is, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism, but accepts people from every nation who love him and who do what is right." The first is from something Martin Luther King wrote in 1956 entitled, "Paul's Letter to American Christians" and the second comes from the moment when, after seeing the vision of the blanket full of food in Joppa and meeting Cornelius the Centurion, Peter has a revelation about the true nature of God in Acts chapter 10.

In these two statements lies the connecting piece – that God is love and His love is available to all who love and do what is godly, regardless of how an individual or a community or a faith group defines him or her! That is the aim and purpose of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity as well – to see beyond those things that separate us to embrace our commonality which is belief in and love of Jesus our Lord, Messiah, Friend and Brother. In his letter, Dr. King says, "the Church is the Body of Christ. So when the Church is true to its nature it knows neither division or disunity" He then quotes the real Paul, "...God who made the world and all things therein has made of one blood all nations of people for all to dwell on the face of the earth."

Peter, who at first had the greatest enmity towards and fear of Saul of Tarsus and didn't really trust him and his "conversion story", has a revelation in which God assures him that Saul, now Paul, is for real and is to be embraced as a brother in the Lord. You see, even in the earliest Christian community, there was division and rancor – who was in (the original followers of Jesus) and who was out (everyone else!); which heritage mattered more, Judaism or the pagan religions of the empire; whose leadership one chose to follow – Jesus or Peter or Paul or James or others; what the mission of the Church was to be and everything else you can imagine. Paul was to say to all the Church, "In Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, slave nor free but all are one in Christ" and this was to become the driving theology of the earliest Church.

Peter hadn't always been so accepting of others – when he first met Jesus and became a disciple along with his brother Andrew, he did not trust some who came after, seeing them as rivals if you will for the affection of The Master. Indeed, he was seen by others in the fellowship as someone who was rather prone to gaffs and mistakes and was therefore dismissed, but Jesus saw through Peter's

humanness and touched the divine spark within his friend. Every once in a while, Peter's spark glowed and became red-hot, as when Jesus asked the disciples who they thought he was. They hemmed and hawed, saying that various people thought a variety of things about Jesus, but it was Peter, dear Peter who, as Luke says, blurted out, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." The response of Jesus was simple: "Well said, my friend. You did not learn this from humans but from God " and this affirmation became THE statement of entry into the community which was to evolve into the one holy, catholic and apostolic church to which we, as good Anglicans' belong to this day.. Jesus then said to Simon, "You are Petros, Cephas and upon this rock will I build my Church."As a baptismal ritual was being developed in the fledgling community, the simplest qualification for a person to become a part of the fellowship was to affirm who Jesus was by saying simply, "Jesus is Lord." which Paul articulated to the Corinthians when he said, "No one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed', and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." At the very heart of it all, at the core of Christianity is that simple three word creed – Jesus is Lord. Sometimes I wonder why the early church wasn't content with that simple statement and had to develop much more convoluted and confusing creeds for us to recite, rather than that utterly disarming statement of faith to which we can and should dance before the Lord?

Isn't it unfortunate that we seem to need a week for the Church to think and pray about so gentle a statement of faith and find our unity and our common mission in Peter's confession ? I also find it strange that we need a week for this while devoting only one day in the year for the World Day of Prayer for Peace. As Alice says as she wanders through her Wonderland, "Curiouser and curiouser" - indeed!

Martin Luther King spent a lot of his time trying to move his particular Baptist fellowship from a narrow sectarianism into an ecumenism in which all Christian and non-Christian faiths together could stand against the powers of darkness . Sometimes, he succeeded and sometimes he found his own brother clergy seeing through the dimmest and narrowest glasses imaginable as he wrote of them in his letter from prison in the city of Birmingham Alabama. And yet, he was able to create a coalition of Christians and members of the Jewish community which, by blood, sweat, tears and sometimes martyrdom, changed not only the face of America but of the world itself. Dr. King and Peter both recognized that God's love was made available to all who had love as the cornerstone of their lives and actions and that recognition resulted in both of their deaths – Peter being crucified upside down in Rome and Martin being shot on a balcony in Memphis.

For both Martin and Peter, these words from that letter written by a young clergyman in Atlanta were the foundation-stones of their ministries and their commitment: " I still believe that love is the most durable power in the world...I think I have discovered the highest good: it is love. This principle stands at the centre of the cosmos... (Calvary) is the telescope through which we look out into the long vista of eternity and see the love of God breaking forth into time. It is an eternal reminder to a power-drunk generation that love is the most durable power in the world, and it is at the bottom the heartbeat of the moral cosmos. "

Al this Martin was to fully share with the world in his famous, I Have a Dream speech in Washington in 1963: I want to end this trifecta of remembrances today with a few words from that moment on the Washington Mall which have continue to inform the worldwide universal Church of Jesus Christ as to her mission and place in the world for all times and for all peoples:

listen to Martin speak - "When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every hamlet and village, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up the day when all of God's children – black people and white people, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants – will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

And so to Peter and Martin, our grateful hearts sing their Thank Yous and our pledge to keep our eyes on the prize which is peace, justice and equity for all, regardless of race, creed, religion and gender today, this week and for all time. Alleluia!

Fr. Michael: As Peter confesses Jesus as Lord and Saviour, so too we proclaim our faith as we say,
People: **I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father He will come again
to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen**

Fr. Michael: Let us pray that the light of Christ may shine upon the Church throughout the world and for all people according to their need. Thank you, Father, for granting such faith to Peter that he could boldly confess your Son as The Christ. Thank you for promising that the gates of hell cannot withstand the gracious battering-ram of your faith-filled Church. Thank you for the forgiveness of sin that the Church pronounces in Jesus' name and at his command. We pray today for our Diocese and St. John's, Smiths Falls and their priest The Reverend Canon Catherine Ascah. We pray for the work and ministry of our Diocesan Ecumenical Officer, The Venerable Linda Hill and for our Diocesan Newspaper Crosstalk, and for Leigh Anne Williams, Editor.

People: **Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer**

Fr. Michael: Lord, make your Church boldly confess Jesus as your Son, the Saviour and Messiah of the world. Strengthen the Church to generously forgive the repentant sinner. Use your Church as the means by which you draw all persons to yourself and shape us in your divine likeness.

People: **Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.**

Fr. Michael: Make disciples of every person here at Holy Trinity and give us willing and hope-filled hearts. Help us to use our spiritual gifts to glorify you and build up our community of faith. Make us bold to tell others, "This is the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Lord, we hold those of our parish family who are in need or who are in dire situations before you now, beginning with those whom we hold in our hearts (leave a moment for silence and time for people to name those for whom they are praying)

We pray for Howard, Irene, Marjorie, Roy, Zachariah, Jeanette, Cheryl and their families.

People: **Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.**

Fr. Michael: Bless the Church wherever it is persecuted because of Jesus. By its witness, turn its enemies from hatred to repentance throughout the world. For missionaries, for our seminaries and schools and for all who seek to proclaim the gospel in word and deed, we lift up our hearts and voices in prayer

People: **Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.**

Fr. Michael: Lord, this week we celebrate the Confession of Peter, the life and ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King and the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and we thank you for this triple blessing. Teach us to value one another not based on race, creed or gender, but because you have created all people in your image and have given Jesus as the sacrifice of all our sin.

By your Holy Spirit, may the content of our hearts reflect your will so that we may treat everyone with respect, justice and love.

People: **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Fr. Michael: Enlighten the minds and purify the hearts of all those who take counsel for the nations of your world. Turn them away from the false gods of power, prestige and ideology and teach them your ways. Heal the divisions that hurt our country and bestow your favour upon us so that we may ever be a beacon of your faithfulness to us.

People: **Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.**

Fr. Michael: Most gracious Father, we thank you for all your faithful servants who have died among us but whose lives are safely in your hand. Sustain us with that same strong and merciful hand. Equip us with every spiritual gift to trust and to follow Jesus and to bear the light of his love and forgiveness to everyone around us.

And fed in fellowship with Christ Jesus, may we be found worthy on the day when He is revealed on earth once again as Lord of lords and King of kings.

People: **Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.**

Fr. Michael: All fall short of the glory of God. As we go about our lives, that glory is diminished but not absent. In making our confession, let us remove the dull sheen of what is wrong and allow the glory to shine through God's grace. Let us pray,

People: **Loving and gracious God, you are so patient with us. We run away and you seek and find us. We make foolish choices, and you teach us a better way. We hurt you and others, and instead of hurting us back, you forgive us and enfold us to your heart. Help us, Loving God; help us we pray to reveal your glory and goodness in how we live so that we will bear the imprint of Christ for all to see. We pray this in Jesus' name.**

Fr. Michael: Friends, hear the good news and the mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting. In Jesus we are all forgiven.

People: **Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Amen.**

Fr. Michael: O Lord, you have illuminated the Star of hope in our lives. Help us to be united in our commitment to bring about your Reign of love, justice and peace and so to be the light of hope to all those living in the darkness of despair and disillusionment. Shine your light upon us and set our hearts on fire so that your love surrounds us with warmth. Lift us up to you, you who have emptied yourself for our sake, so that our lives may glorify you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

People: Open for us light into our darkness, courage for our fear, hope for our despair, peace for our turmoil. Open to us joy for our sorrow, strength for our weakness, wisdom for our confusion, love for our hate. Open to us your Self for our selves. Lord, Lord, open to us.
(Howard Thurmon)

Fr. Michael: O God, we thank you for the lives of great saints and prophets in the past who have revealed to us that we can stand up amid the problems and difficulties and trials of life and not give in. We thank you for our foreparents who've given us something in the midst of the darkness of exploitation and oppression to keep going.

Grant that we will go on with the proper faith and the proper determination of will so that we will be able to make a creative contribution to this world, In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray....God, we thank you for the inspiration of Jesus.

Grant that we will love you with all our hearts, souls and minds and love our neighbours as we love our selves, even our enemy neighbours. And we ask you, God, in these days of emotional tension, when the problems of the world are gigantic in extent and chaotic in detail, to be with us in our going out and in our coming in,

in our rising up and in our lying down, in our moments of joy and in our moments of sorrow, until the day when there shall be no sunset and no dawn. Amen

(Martin Luther King Jr from Thou Dear God: Prayers That Open Hearts and Spirits)

Fr. Michael: Go now in peace to love and serve the Lord and each other. Go in the name and the power of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Worship follows the Holy Eucharist in the Book of Alternative Services.

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