



The Prayer Book Society of Canada

Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island Branch

PO Box 8292 CSC, Halifax, NS B3K 5M1

Epiphany 2014

Liturgy is literacy!

Too many words, it might be said about *The Book of Common Prayer*, not unlike Emperor Joseph II's complaint about Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, "too many notes!" But is it really? Or is it more a feature of our age of the quick text message, the Tweet and the Selfie, that makes us reluctant to be more like Mary in the story of Christmas who "kept all these things" that were said about the Child Christ "and pondered them in her heart?"

Mark Your Calendar

Candlemas

Sunday, February 2nd, 2014

The Society will sponsor a Choral Evensong at St. George's Round Church, Halifax, on Sunday, February 2nd, 2014 (Candlemas) at 5:00 pm, to be followed by a reception.

Lenten Quiet Day

Saturday, March 8th, 2014

The Society is pleased to sponsor the annual Lenten Quiet Day to be held at King's-Edgehill School, Windsor, Nova Scotia, on Saturday, March 8th from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm on the theme of *Lent and Original Sin*, led by Rev'd David Curry.

To ponder means to give serious attention to the matters at hand. That requires a certain kind of reading. Some writers, like Christopher Hedges, for example, have bemoaned and lamented the dominance of visual images in our world that seem to triumph over reading. His title says it all, *The Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle*. Is it really a culture of illiteracy? Or is it more a question about what kind of reading? Maybe that is where we need to situate the veritable forest of words that seems to be such a striking feature of *The Book of Common Prayer*. Not much in the way of white spaces on the page! And no pictures!

There is no denying it. Yet this book of many words is remarkable for its measured and modest approach to God and the soul, to our life of prayer and praise, and to the way in which what we read shapes how we are to live and be. Jesus actually asks what is, I think, a modern question, though perhaps a question for all ages, namely, "how readest thou?" (Luke 10.26). How do you read? That question turns again upon another question, "What do you read?" Jesus is responding to the rather cynical and skeptical question of a lawyer who has asked him, "what must [he] do to obtain eternal life?" Jesus response is to ask him, "how do you read the

Law? He has responded, quite marvelously, with what Anglicans know, largely through the Prayer Book, as *The Summary of the Law*, the love of God and the love of neighbour. But he, so Luke tells us, “willing to justify himself” asks in return, “and who is my neighbour?”

This is the setting for one of the most familiar of the parables of the Gospels, the so-called parable of the Good Samaritan (so-called because the adjective ‘good’ does not appear in the actual text but has been, rightly in my view, become part of the interpretation). We often forget that the context of the telling of that parable is a question about reading. How we read shapes how we act. In a way, the parable is a powerful illustration of the nature of spiritual literacy.

It is captured too in the wonderful Collect for *The First Sunday after Epiphany*, in which we pray God that we “may both perceive and know what things [we] ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same.” It is wonderful testament to the idea of spiritual literacy which informs our activity, our thinking and our being, our reading and our doing. It is really all about a kind of deep reading, a meditative and prayerful reading of the Scriptures. For readers and non-readers the prose that is almost poetry and the measured rhythms and cadences of the Prayer Book allow the words to enter into our souls. Almost becoming the words ourselves, as it were. Such is the deeper meaning of “*the Word made flesh.*”

Too many words? Not too many words; just enough words and the right words to shape our souls and to set us in motion to love as we have been loved in Christ.

(Rev'd) David Curry
Feast of the Epiphany,
January 6th, 2014

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