



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

Date: 20 January 2008
Title:
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Isaiah 49: 1-7
Second Reading 1 Corinthians 1:1-89
Gospel John 1:29-42

I am returning to a practice from the past by combining the sermon and my annual report today. This saves time, but it also allows me to apply what Scriptures says to us today as it reflects on our work and ministry here at Holy Trinity throughout the past year.

Perhaps the most appropriate of today's readings is the one from the book of the prophet Isaiah. In it, we have a foretaste of how the Christian faith would build upon its Jewish roots by extending God's mission beyond the scope of one people and nation. The prophet hears God tell him, "You are my servant, (Israel), in whom I shall be glorified." Isaiah has understood his calling to remind his own people of their failings and to bring them back to faithfulness in the God of their Fathers. Now, however, he hears something else- something new: "It is not enough for you to be my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back the survivors of Israel. I will make you the light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." This is one of the first places in the Bible in which God's plan for all of humanity is mentioned, not just the destiny of the Chosen People.

For many of us, the Philippines are at the “ends of the earth.” I suppose Australia and New Zealand may be more remote, but for those of us from Europe or North America, it qualifies. Now, for those who were born here this, of course, doesn't apply. This is the center of the world for them, and places like Manchester and Chicago are “the ends of the world.” This reminds us that perspective is all-important when it comes to viewing our mission as Christians, particularly in this parish.

Holy Trinity has throughout its history had a vocation to be a “light of the nations”. We may have started as a church of and for expats, but as parish of a local Philippine presence of the Anglican tradition we have become increasingly part of the local scene. This is both a blessing and a difficult challenge. If we are honest with ourselves, we will realize that being the multicultural church that we are means more than just serving both litson and tuna casserole at our church dinners- it means having to learn how other cultures, races and people think, react and relate. I have heard Church leaders tell us that with just a little good will this should be easy. They don't work here. For me, it means dealing every day with new discoveries about Tagalogs, Visayans, Ilokans, Bikolaños, Igorots, Chebucanos, Pampangans, British, Chinese, Australians, New Zealanders, Indians, Sri Lankans, Tongans, Figians, Lithuanians, Swedes, Norwegians, Germans, Danes...did I leave anyone out? Given the multicolored crazy quilt that Holy Trinity parish represents, the surprise is not that we have conflicts from time to time, but that we get along so well!

This means that we are bound to encounter interpersonal conflicts in our common life here, and we have had some doozies in 2007, but that eventually we are called to deal with them. As your pastor, I have been the focus both of conflict and of healing. I have also been the cause of some of the conflict in the past year, for which I take responsibility and ask forgiveness. I have, however, tried to do the best I could to administer and minister.

Ours is a small parish with fewer resources than some other multicultural congregations. What we lack in numbers, however, we can make up for in the personal way we can welcome and incorporate others into our common life here. The more various kinds of people who become active at Holy Trinity, the less we fall

victim to the tendency to treat our church as a private club for only one group. I hope that we have been able to succeed in this in 2007.

There are other aspects of 2007 that had less to do with ethnic mixing and more to do with finances. We skated very close to the edge of financial disaster last year: something that isn't always visible to the eye of those who visit us here and who think that we have a nice, clean, air-conditioned church with a nice blend of friendly, happy people. Someone has to pay for all of this, and that's where our stewardship comes in- particularly our pledge program. This remains our single most important asset. There are no pennies falling from an American heaven or any other foreign source to support what we do here. I can therefore express heartfelt thanks to those who have been faithful supporters of our stewardship here, and encourage others to join up.

As your pastor, I have tried to continue the pastoral and educational work of the parish, in addition to the administration of the office and, of course, our worship. Bible study and Lenten groups have continued, augmented by a new gathering at the home of the Shorts on Wednesday evenings last year. Holy Trinity also hosted several concerts, the annual Advent and Independence Day services of the Manila Norwegian community, and our annual Remembrance Day observance.

My personal thanks are due to the assisting clergy here at Holy Trinity: Canon Dimanche, Fr Barry, Fr Geoff, and Fr Marc, and to the Wardens Andy Malpass and Judy Reinke, the Parish Treasurer Edison Yap and the Vestry who have ably and self-sacrificially overseen the fiscal operations of our parish. Nothing would happen here without our Administrative Assistant Clair Agustin and our Bookkeeper Mericel Bangilan, our Sexton Agosto Macli and his "sidekicks" and scholarship recipients Gapak and Eyek, my special friend and helper Rose Amancio and our skilled driver Glen. These form our "family" here in the compound and also deserve your thanks for making our parish life look effortless despite the work involved.

2008 will without doubt be a time of change for us. I am half-way through my eighth year as your rector, and we will together be making some important decisions about

our collective futures in the months ahead. This will require clear heads and warm hearts for the vestry and the officers it elects tomorrow night. It will also involve all of the members and friends of Holy Trinity who support our work, believe in what we stand for, and want to see us survive and thrive.

In closing, I want to return to the theme of today's first reading and its call to Israel to look beyond itself and witness to the world: "a light to the nations." Today's collect, or theme prayer, says it all, really: "Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine in the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be know, worshiped and obeyed to the ends of the earth." If we have done that even in a small part in 2007, we will not have failed, and if we can commit ourselves to that for 2008, we are on the right track. May God bless our parish, our people and our witness.

-The Rev Tyler A. Strand