

2 Sunday A

January 15, 2023

St. Patrick

Nine days ago, Friday January 6th, I visited Shannon and her husband Hank, he having been moved to an ICU room the night before. Shortly after I arrived, Shannon pointed out from the hospital's sixth floor room, in the distance, our bell tower at St. Patrick's. In the next five days, often I found myself looking at our bell tower in the distance. It reminded me, not of a building, but that I—*we*—were connected to a community, a church. I needed the reminder that we were linked to St. Patrick's *Church*.

Starting this Sunday, up until the beginning of Lent at the end of February, we'll be hearing from the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, and it's about church. Today we got the introduction, the first lines, of this letter. St. Paul writes: **“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus...to the church of God that is in Corinth.”** He had founded the church in the year 50, ministering there two years. Then, he left Corinth to start up other churches elsewhere. Four years later, the church in Corinth numbered about a hundred persons, no more than 150...a little smaller than we are here at St. Pat's. If St. Paul were writing us at St. Patrick's, he call us “the church of God that is in zip code 38126, and in the neighborhood where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was martyred.”

The Apostle Paul wrote to remind that church then—*and us now*—that we are **“sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.”** In fact, we heard in today's Gospel that John the Baptist points to the One **“who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”** That, my friends, is why we are **“sanctified.”** Our baptism celebrates how we've been made holy, sacred—not because of our merits but due to God's over-the-top love—and thus **“called to be saints.”**

In this past week I experienced how much I need *us*, the church. I realized in a fresh way that, together with the Holy Spirit, we offer one another solace and support. I need that bond we share, symbolized well as we hold hands singing the “Our Father.” Oh, I kept looking out at that bell tower in the distance. It reminded me, in so much anguish, what you mean to Shannon and Hank...and to me. No doubt about it: St. Paul would remind us again and again that we're **“sanctified in Christ Jesus.”**

Toward the end of his letter to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul gives what was then the novel teaching that we are the Body of Christ, grafted onto the body in our baptism. Just as the human body has many parts—different, yes, but needing to work together, Paul uses the human body as a metaphor of who we are as—*we*, a church.

The last witness Hank gave at his death was offering organs and tissues of his body to be of service to others in their need. Oh, if had been around during his time, St. Paul would have run with the deep meaning behind organ donation. It is a poignant and powerful witness of what it means to be joined together—in our bodies and, yes, as the Body of Christ.

Hank died at noon this past Wednesday. Later in the afternoon, at the rectory, suddenly I heard our church bells ringing from that bell tower I kept looking at in the hospital room. Quickly I came down to the church. Earlier in the morning Shannon had told me that Hank's dear friends, Angus and James, wanted to see our church. I found the three of them in the sacristy—at the rope, the two men ringing the bell. Just before the “honor walk,” Shannon, the two men, and I gathered around Hank's bed, and I led the prayers the church recommends for the dying. As I joined them in ringing the bell, I remembered one of the prayers—the words of Jesus to the “Good Thief” nailed on the cross next to him. I said at the bedside, “Hank, Jesus says to you, ***Today you will be with me in paradise.***”

I joined in ringing the bell—letting the neighborhood hear from our bell tower the hope that ties us together...being with Jesus in paradise. And being with him as church, *right now*—joined together as members of *his* one Body. That, St. Pat's, is what we are now, and that is our hope.

Hold onto that hope. Ring the bell.

General Intercessions

January 15, 2023

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Bring together in unity all those consecrated in the waters of Baptism, that the Church truly be one, and that we carry out Jesus' mission together; We pray to you, O Lord:

On this weekend in which we remember the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., rid all forms of bigotry and prejudice from among us, and empower us to live truly as God's beloved people; We pray to you, O Lord:

Help us to secure the rights of the poor and the oppressed, as well as those of immigrants and refugees; We pray to you, O Lord—

Prosper efforts to make quality health care, housing and education affordable for all people; We pray to you, O Lord—

Sustain those who suffer depression, despair, or the dark night of the soul; We pray to you, O Lord—

Embrace in your love all who have died, especially Hank Haney; We pray to you, O Lord—

