

Sunday, June 08, 2025

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

Procession and Solemn Eucharist (Valedictory)

11:00 am

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Canon Carl Turner

on

John 14:8-17, 25-27

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We find ourselves wanting to do more, making something beautiful for God.

The word 'liturgy' means 'the work of the people.' What that means is that we are *all* engaged in the offering of worship. Although the liturgy of the church, particularly the beauty of Cranmer's Prayer Book and Coverdale's Psalter, inspired what we now take for granted in the theater – notably the theater of Shakespeare – nevertheless, we engage with the liturgy as *participants* and not as an audience. This is important, because it means that those who have specific roles in the liturgy, including the choir, are not performers on a stage, but involved in the worship as much as the congregation. This is particularly true of Cathedrals and Churches like ours that have a strong musical tradition. It is so easy to be duped into thinking that Church Music works because we budget money for it or, because we pay professionals to do it well and *for* us. Paying professionals does not always produce the expected results; after all, Noah's Ark was built by amateurs, but the Titanic by professionals!

Our worship is to be a celebration of our incorporation into God's life, and those who are charged with leading the singing of God's people – whether in a small parish Church or in a great Cathedral – have at the heart of their ministry the **joy** of announcing God's presence with his people and the transforming reality of his presence. At our commencement ceremony yesterday, Mr. Seeley talked about joy as being a powerful tool because joy is a subversive word in a world where people often put themselves first and put others down.

Bakore, Rocco, Arthur, Dominic; you have been part of a choir that is at the heart of our worship God in this place. You have played your part in announcing the joy of God's presence here in this palace. The choir that you have belonged to is part of a great continuum stretching back over time, and looks forward in hope. Year on year, it is never quite the same just as each voice of a chorister who joins the choir is unique, but the choir always has the same purpose – to help all of us worship better; through holiness, truth, beauty, love, and surrender – and to the best of our ability – as we gather up everything we do in selfless adoration and praise.

The Eleventh Rector, Father John Andrew, once said this, *“The choir isn’t there to silence a congregation into passive acquiescence. Or to impress. Choirs are there to help us by leading the way so that we can follow gladly – with energy and delight...We find ourselves wanting to do more, making something beautiful for God.”*^[1]

We find ourselves wanting to do more, making something beautiful for God.

Bakore, Rocco, Arthur, Dominic; that is at the heart of our mission statement – to worship, love and serve our Lord Jesus Christ. And note, that worship comes first in that mission statement. Over the past few years, you have put this into practice; for you, and for those who have cared for you in our Choir School, there has been a blurred boundary between liturgy, learning, and living. Those three ‘L’s’ – liturgy, learning, and living – are inextricably linked because you are not just in a residential school, you are in a Choir School, and not just a Choir School but a Church School, and not just a Church School, but an Episcopal School. Mr. Seeley has lived that life for you as an example – he has watched you grow in confidence, skill, and motivation; he has helped you engage with the liturgy; he has encouraged you to learn; so that you live out your lives to the full.

Bakore, Rocco, Arthur, Dominic; what a wonderful feast day to celebrate your leave-taking because the Feast of Pentecost is often described as the Birthday of the Church. Only a couple of weeks ago, you were baptized or renewed your baptismal promises and were confirmed by Bishop Shin. However, it did not happen on your own – it happened alongside 20 other people who were also committing their lives to Jesus and his Church.

Pentecost is a Feast of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit gives gifts to all members of the Church. We sometimes call those gifts *charisms* because of the Greek word that means grace or gift freely given. On this day when we celebrate the charisms of the spirit – the grace freely given – the gifts poured out on the Church through the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray that all who are leaving today will be filled with that same Spirit – to be truly charismatic in the right sense of that word which puts God first and our self-importance second.

As you grow older, you will no doubt have many challenges on the way; you will have difficult choices placed before you; you will make mistakes; you may even question some of things that you have, thus far, professed. All of those things are, nevertheless, part of you reaching your full potential. When you have moments like that, listen again to the words of Jesus in our Gospel reading today: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”* Notice that Jesus says to his disciples that his peace **is not of this world** – it is a qualitatively different kind of peace to the shallowness so often presented by the world. If there are times when you are not successful, then remember what I say to all Grade 8 boys leaving us for High School: I hope you will always see Saint Thomas Church as a kind of second home; a place where you can return, even when things are tough, to discover arms open in welcome.

Bakore, Rocco, Arthur, Dominic; when you became choristers, you were given your hymn book and told to not just believe what you sing but to practice it in your life. I pray that you will put into practice what you have sung here and the words of the eleventh Rector, Fr. John Andrew: May you **find yourselves wanting to do more, making something beautiful for God**. Or, as Mr. Seeley said to you yesterday, *‘remember that joy is an act of resistance.’*

References

- 1 'Nothing Cheap and Much that is Cheerful' p. 179
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