

Epiphany V (February 5, 2012)

O Lord, we beseech thee to keep thy Church and household continually in thy true religion; that they who do lean only upon the hope of thy heavenly grace may evermore be defended by thy mighty power; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Know God, make God known. This is the basic template of the Christian life. As we hear in the Gospel lesson, Jesus and His followers leave the synagogue and proceed to bring the Good News of God's Kingdom to the world by way of love and action; bringing healing to a world in need. They worship God, and then they serve God. This is the proper order of things: know God, and then make Him known—for you cannot possibly make known what you do not first know yourself. This is what we at St. John's are called to be about. We gather here, in this house of God, to come to know Him more and more, and upon knowing Him we are compelled to

devote ourselves to His service. This is why we are here; this is why we exist. Know God, make God known.

We will be leaving this worship area in a little while to gather again: in our meeting as a Vestry, we will come together to look back with thanksgiving and to look forward with hope. We will make decisions and we will make plans so that we may effectively move forward doing the work of God: bringing healing to a world in desperate need of the Divine Love.

If we are to be effective in our mission, we need to be faithful to our calling. The Collect appointed for today is poignant. In it, we pray to the Lord that He shall keep His Church and household in His true religion. And so, we might ask, what is true religion? For an answer we can turn to the Epistle of St. James, in which we are

told the following: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1. 27). True religion is a life lived grounded in God, causing us to act as agents of His love—love in action. Know God, make God known.

The Collect continues: “that they who do lean only upon the hope of thy heavenly grace may evermore be defended by thy mighty power.” We as God’s church and household are to seek to be supported by His heavenly grace alone, and upon doing so we shall be defended by Him. If we hope to remain a viable, flourishing church, we must lean only upon God’s heavenly grace—His heavenly help—to support us. Our fear (in other words, our reverence and awe) must be

directed towards God alone and not in ourselves; and, putting our whole trust in Him, we may go forward as a people blessed by Him. We are not called to be a self-sufficient parish: we are called to be a God-sufficient parish, for it our Lord who provides, and not we ourselves.

It would be folly for us to seek to be supported by our own feeble strength, to think that we are the ones keeping this place—this church—going. As Isaiah makes clear to us in the First Lesson, nothing earthly can possibly compare with the might and strength of the Lord. And the Psalm this morning also makes this truth abundantly clear:

“He hath no pleasure in the strength of an horse, neither delighteth he in any man’s legs. But the Lord’s delight is in them that fear him, and put their trust in his mercy” (Ps. 147. 10, 11).

We must not rely upon our own strength, our own resources, our own abilities: because human might will ultimately fail us. Rather, as St. Paul reminds us in the Epistle this morning, we are to allow ourselves to be shaped and formed into whatever vessel God needs us to be in order to be effective ministers of His gospel. We here at St. John's have a bright future ahead of us. Let us now seize the opportunities of God which are before us, and as we journey forward let us be sure to ground ourselves in true religion. Let us indeed know God, and make God known. Amen.

Father A. E. Nussey