



ALWAYS AND EVERYWHERE

It is right and a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks.

Dead man working

I've seen the dead working. To preside at the high altar of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City on the feast of St. Paul's conversion was an enormous treat, part of a Bishop's Day with Youth adventure with a group of 90 young people and adults. (See page A1)



BY BISHOP PAUL V. MARSHALL

I had seen that altar only from far away. After some 50 years of looking up at it, off and on, it was a thrill to approach it to lead worship.

I saw something that first irritated, and then moved me.

There has been since the 1940s, over the high altar, a wonderful representation of Christ in glory, a *Christus Rex* that uses the facial figures of all the racial groups. Everyone can identify with it.

What initially irritated me is that this beautiful cross, which hangs on lovely gilt chains, apparently can sway a little in the breezes that must pass through one of the world's largest churches. Somebody thought it might be better if Jesus didn't sway.

Two strands of fishing line anchor the cross ... to the marble hands of the dead bishop who is buried behind the high altar. I have pictures.

Only one who stands at the altar, a place roped off from visitors, can see this improvised fix that is essentially invisible to more than 99 per cent of those who pray or visit.

The fishing line irritated me because of the casual disrespect shown to the dead bishop by making his sarcophagus into a paperweight. Looping fishing line around his praying hands also suggests devaluing prayer itself. Martha: 10; Mary: 0.

Still, it is hard to be angry at what I'm sure was not intended as impiety or

insensitivity in a day when we routinely express our new spiritual freedom by far more shocking acts of casual desecration in supposedly relevant worship experiences.

The more I study modern psychoanalytic theory, the more I am convinced that the need to cut ritual and mystery down to size and even abuse them isn't a movement; it's a symptom, an ugly one, but that's for another time.

When life gives you lemons, make metaphors. From an actuarial point of view, I am closer to my death than to my birth, closer to ending than beginning my career.

It is comforting to think that even after one is gone, something of what one was or did could help keep things steady for the next generation.

It is comforting to remember that there are things we can give, write, say, or do that will affect the future of our faith. Like the dead bishop, we may contribute to its stabilization in ways we cannot anticipate.

For example, I recall that hundreds of young women in Schuylkill County and beyond have been assisted in getting a college education because a gift given a century ago for a project that could not be accomplished has been converted into a scholarship fund.

It works both ways. Thinking about the fishing line that keeps Bishop Potter working and allows visitors to see a marvelous representation of Christ more clearly made me stop just for a moment in a very busy day and remember that almost everything I know best and value most is attached to the hands of one dead person or another. Many threads keep each of us in place.

[Bishop Horatio Potter was the 6th Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. He conceived and founded the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the largest cathedral in the Western Hemisphere, though he did not live to see the foundation stone laid. The cathedral was constructed under the guidance of his nephew, Henry Codman Potter, who succeeded Horatio as Bishop of New York.]

I find myself torn. Fortunately, the decoration of a church in another state is not my problem. On the one hand, if that were my grandfather's likeness being used to anchor the fishing line, I might be protesting in the cathedral office this minute.

On the other hand, if that were my grandfather holding steady the most inviting image of Christ I know so that others could see it, I might think he was still answering the call to fish for people that was given so long ago in Galilee. I'd be thankful.

One of the highlights of the visit was talking with – and listening to – our young people. The context was the use of the Labyrinth, a twisting-and turning prayer path that deliberately disorients our inner ears and spatial perceptions to allow our inmost thoughts to emerge undefended, and to allow God to get a word in edgewise.

After walking the Labyrinth with them, I leveled with them about my own feelings. Having made the walk at this point in my life, I decided to trust them with some of the secrets about being at my end of life. Then I asked them how walking this deliciously reorienting path had affected them. The next forty-five minutes were breathtaking.

It would be inappropriate to give details of what any individual shared, but I want to describe the conversation. With

clarity and insight, these young people, sixth through twelfth grade, talked about the stresses of their lives and how they understand them spiritually.

They were way ahead of some adults in understanding that their intersection with each other involved the opportunity to receive support in their times of difficulty; they have not yet hardened into people who will help others but cannot receive help themselves.

Several spoke of the fact that their lives were fairly pleasant at the moment, and how walking the Labyrinth had made them aware of their opportunity to be in prayer and service for the sake of those of their friends who were in difficulty. They have been taught well in their parishes and homes. For this, too, I was deeply grateful. ♦

Father Gerns named Canon Pastor to the Bishop

Bishop Paul named Father Andrew Gerns, rector of Trinity Easton, Canon Pastor to the Bishop. He made the announcement during the January 27th celebration at Trinity of Canon Gerns' 25th anniversary of his ordination to priesthood.

"From 1996 until his death in 2006," Bishop Paul said, "The Rev. Canon Father Bryan Williams served this diocese as Canon Pastor to the Bishop. His duties were to provide the pastoral care which any Christian would expect to receive, but which our church oddly neglects to provide for bishops, with particular attention to the maintenance of the spiritual health of the bishop through stated retreats and repeated checking in, even when such checking might be unwelcome. Alone among the clergy, the Canon Pastor to the Bishop has the right and duty to nag the bishop.

"The Canon Pastor has the task of assisting the bishop in maintaining perspective, hope, and a sense that God always works the divine purpose out, despite or through our best planned efforts ...

"Canon Gerns will, of course, find himself called upon to explain to Roman Catholics that this is our version of Monsignor, and he will be for the most part right, but they will not believe him.

"He has been chosen for many reasons. Chief of them are his outstanding record as a chaplain, his intuitive pastoral sense, and his utter inability to lie to his superiors—as far as we can tell. He is a capable communicator, a clear thinker, and is possessed by a zeal for Christ's kingdom.

"It is no secret that Canon Gerns and I have been acquainted for the best part of thirty years. In appointing him, as was the case with his



The Rev. Canon Andrew Gerns

predecessor, I appoint someone I cannot easily receive about the state of my soul.

"Some canonries are strictly honorary.

Inasmuch as no stipend attaches to this canonry (except for the occasional lunch) and it is for life, it may be considered honorary. Inasmuch as Canon Gerns accepts with it a job that will require all of his cunning as I avoid taking care of myself through the ruse of the complexity of my calendar and my many ghostly preoccupations, he will need your prayers and so must be considered a working canon ..."

Canon Gerns has been rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, Easton, since 2002. In the Diocese of Bethlehem, he is member of Diocesan Council (since 2003) and the Standing Committee of the Diocese. He serves also as chair of the Evangelism Commission of the Diocese. He has been a member of the Commission on Ministry, served as a Deputy to the 75th General Convention in 2006 and was elected as an alternate to the 76th General Convention to be held in 2009. Ordained in 1982, he has served parishes and hospitals in the Dioceses of Connecticut and West Virginia, and became a Board Certified Chaplain of the Association of Professional Chaplains in 1996. He and his wife Peg, a Realtor with Long & Foster of Bethlehem, have two grown children and live in Palmer Township. ♦

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