

“A Quiet Spirituality”

From time to time I like to listen to Carl Haas on the good music station in Pen-sacola. (Actually, Mr. Haas has been deceased for several years now, but his programs are still played.) I like most of the classical music on the programs, and I appreciate Mr. Haas' comments on the music. I know very little about music myself, but so often Mr. Haas gives me the terms to put into words what I am feeling but can-not describe. On one program, Mr. Haas described a string quartet as a conversation between four instruments, a conversation in which each instrument has an equal part. Now I don't care all that much about the “equal” part, but the description of the quartet as a “conversation” makes sense to me! Moreover, about ten days ago, the program was on “The Key of Character”. In this program, Mr. Haas talked about Handel's *Messiah*. Handel wrote the Hallelujah Chorus in the key of D major, Mr. Haas said, because D major is a strong, bright key, and Handel wanted a bright key for the chorus, with all the strength and the kettle drums and the power. Then, Mr. Haas continued, immediately following the Hallelujah Chorus, with all its power, Handel raised the key a whole step to an even brighter key, E major; and in this brighter key we hear the quiet soprano solo: “I know that my Redeemer liveth”. I would never have known any of this myself, but Carl Haas' commentary gives me some terms to put into words something of what I am feeling but could not by myself describe.

It is something like that with the work of the Holy Ghost. There are times when I feel something, but do not always have the words to describe it with. Some time ago a friend of mine, the Rev. Tom Ryce of St. John's in St. Mary's County, used a term that he had heard from a friend of his, actually a clergyman here in Florida. The term was “a quiet spirituality”. That term describes a kind of spirituality of many people I know in the Anglican heritage. They do not “wear their religion on their sleeves”, as the expression has it. It is a quiet conviction. Harry Emerson Fosdick quoted some-one giving advice to his son about religion and telling him, “Make not your religion a thing of fits and starts”! Rather, make it steady and dependable. For many people I know, religion is a matter of quiet and steady conviction.

It is a quiet spirituality, because it is an inward conviction. Such an inward conviction is expressed so well in the hymn of John Newton, “Amazing Grace”. In the second stanza of that hymn, Newton expresses directly the phrase that is repeated in our collect today: fear and love. “Twas grace that taught my heart to fear”, because grace reveals the holiness of God, before whom sinful man is afraid. “Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,/ And grace my fear relieved.” The same grace that shows us the holiness of God also reveals His mercy and His love. It is a quiet spirituality, because there is an inwardness about it.

But the fact that it is a quiet, inward spirituality does not mean that it is weak. One of the greatest speeches made before battle was made by Lord Nelson. It is also one of the shortest—one quiet sentence. Before the naval Battle of Trafalgar,

Lord Nelson said: "England expects every man to do his duty." That was all, but that was enough. It was all that was needed for them to "put it all on the line". And no one more than Lord Nelson himself, who was mortally wounded during the battle, but who would not let himself be taken to his quarters until victory was assured! A quiet spirituality.

And when we think of a quiet spirituality, we can think of our Lord's first announcement of His whole mission. In the Gospel of St. John, this announcement was made quietly, to one person. Our Lord did not call a press conference; the disciples were not handing out bumper stickers. Christ made the announcement to one person: a woman! Archbishop Temple tells us that in Jesus' time it was against the law for a man to speak to a woman in public, even to his own wife. Moreover, the woman was an outsider, a Samaritan. "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." Our Lord made his announcement quietly, to one person, a woman who was an outsider. The woman had said, "I know that Messiah cometh", and Jesus answered, "I that speak to thee am He". A quiet spirituality.

So often in this parish I see a quiet conviction and commitment. Let us cherish it and nourish it with prayer and reading of Scripture and contemplation. It is the Spirit who leads us to Christ. As our Epistle says today, "And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us." (I St. John 3:24b) It is the Spirit that leadeth us to Christ; it is the Spirit that leadeth us to the table of the Lord who, in our Gospel today, sends His servants out into the highways and byways, so "that my house may be filled". (St. Luke 14:23) Our Father is not trying to keep people out, but to bring them in so that His house may be filled. It is the Spirit who leads us to share in His meal and in His love.

A sermon preached at All Saints Church, Pensacola, Florida, on The Second Sunday after Trinity, 21 June 1998, by The Rev. Hugh B. Hall, Jr.