

11/27/2024

Thanksgiving...

Well, it's almost upon us, that great feast day, when we offer our thanks to God for all God's many mercies. I pray that you and your friends and relations have a most splendid and peaceful day. That you enjoy each other's company and have a deliciously savory meal and that, for the love of all that is holy, you can avoid conversations that might cause controversy – if only for one day. On Thanksgiving, let's be grateful for all the people in our lives. And I pray safe travels to all upon our roads, rails and in our skies.

Know that among the blessings for which I am most profoundly grateful is you, my beloved ones at St. Clement's. As St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, so I write to you, "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you?" (1 Thes 3:9).

It occurs to me that as you and yours gather around dinner table, someone might want a prayer. Knowing you are a churchgoer and a follower of Christ, they might turn to you and say something like, "hey [you], you're religious, why don't you say the grace!" As you sit there wide-eyed, mouth agape at the very suggestion, your mind reeling in search of words in the moment, know this, whatever you say will be just fine. Any honest and earnest prayer, especially prayers of gratitude, are acceptable to God.

As Meister Eckhart once said, "if the only prayer you ever pray in the whole of your life is 'thank you God,' it will be enough!" The point is you don't have to have the perfect words. Just speak from your heart about that for which you are truly grateful.

There are, of course, many excellent prayers in our *Book of Common Prayer* under the title "Grace before meals." They follow below, along with some others that my family uses regularly at mealtimes. You could use any of these, if you like, or you might just ask everyone to hold hands. Say "we are going to do something different this year. I'm going to start, and we are all going to go around the table and name *just one thing* before God for which we are truly thankful today – and no repeats please." When everyone has named that one thing, you could say, "for these and all your mercies, O God, your holy Name be blessed and praised; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Or if your family is less wordy, you might say instead, "let us all pause for just a moment and, in the silence, contemplate in our own hearts those things for which we are truly

grateful this day.” After a minute or two of quiet, you could all simply say, “Amen.” God hears those prayers too, even if they aren’t spoken aloud. God knows our hearts, and what we cherish. But sometimes we have to be reminded. We have to remember that for which we are grateful. We need a moment to consider all our many blessings. Personally, I prefer to name these aloud, but others may not.

Well, with no further ado, here are a few short prayers that might be helpful.

“Bless, O Lord, thy gifts to our use and us to thy service; for Christ’s sake. Amen” (BCP, 835)

“Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive through thy merciful bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

“Thank you for the food before us, thank you for the love between us, and for all our many blessings. Amen.”*

“For every cup and plateful, please make us truly grateful. [Forgive us when we’re wasteful, for we’re all God’s family.] Amen.”*

“God is great, God is good. Let us thank him for our food. By his hand, we all are fed. Give us, Lord, our daily bread. Amen.”*

“Lord Jesus, be our guest; our morning joy, our evening rest. And with our daily bread impart, your love and peace to every heart. Amen.”*

“Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the Universe, for you give us food to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (BCP, 835)

“Give us grateful hearts, our Father, for all thy mercies, and make us mindful of the needs of others; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (BCP, 835)

Several of these prayers come from a booklet of “Family Graces,” produced by Forward Movement. We distributed these tabletop booklets to the congregation many years ago and it features a meal prayer for each day of the month. We’ve used ours for something like ten years. It looks a little worse for wear but is still a great resource. Not sure if they are still in print, but if so, we’ll get our hands on some more to distribute.

One of the most beautiful things we do at St. Clement's is something we are doing tonight. Our outreach committee has provided a Thanksgiving meal for our homeless guests who shelter here during these wintry months. This is the second year they've provided the meal, and it is lovely! It is prayer incarnate, and it is a vision of the Kingdom where all are fed and received with love. For that we are grateful!

As always, I welcome your feedback: frpatrick@scbythesea.org

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Patrick

* Forward Movement

12/5/2024

Nicholas...

Tomorrow is the feast day of St. Nicholas, and though I've written to you about him in the past, I felt the urge to do so again, because I'm still amazed at how few people realize that "old Saint Nick" was an actual person. Saint Nicholas was the inspiration for our "Santa Claus," of course, but the historical Nicholas (c.270-343) was a real saint of the Church and was bishop of Myra (a town in modern-day Turkey) in the fourth century.

Often on the eve of his feast day, in various countries, children will leave out a shoe or boot by the front door, hoping that St. Nicholas will fill them with some small gift. That might be candy or an orange, or one of those small bags of gold-foil covered coins that have chocolate inside. My daughter has left her shoe out there tonight, and I'm sure she'll find some of those coins in it tomorrow. And you might wonder about the significance of those coins.

Well, the story goes something like this. There was a man who was blessed with three beautiful daughters. But he was a poor man, and in those days a dowry was required when it was time for a young lady to marry. The prospects for any woman who could not marry in those times were bleak, indeed heartbreaking. The man did not know what to do, for he was also a very proud man, too proud to ask for help and he would not have accepted charity from anyone.

As the oldest of his daughters reached marrying age, the man despaired. What would

become of his beloved daughter, for he knew that he could not provide what was needed for her dowry. Thankfully, our good saint also knew of their plight, for they were a faithful family too. And on passing by the house one evening, well after dark, Nicholas tossed a small bag of gold coins through an open window to provide for the young lady's dowry. She was rescued from what would have been a miserable fate and could marry.

Everyone rejoiced at this miracle. But the father - though elated - was also suspicious. Remember he was a proud man. Time passed and life continued, until the second daughter reached the age to marry, and the man again began to worry. "How," he wondered, would he provide for this beloved daughter? He'd never be able to do so, given his limited means. One night, after dark, again came the good saint, who threw another small bag of gold coins through an open window. The family was saved and the girl could wed.

But, this time the father was a bit indignant. "A miracle once perhaps," thought the father, "but twice?" He wasn't one to take anyone's charity, even if it was for a good reason. When the third daughter came of age, the father was on the lookout. He watched every night through the window at all the passersby and stayed awake. But our enterprising saint outsmarted him, climbing up the chimney at the end of the house and onto the rooftop, he dropped the bag of gold coins down through the chimney, where they fell right into the youngest daughter's stocking that had been hung there in front of the fire to dry.

She found it in the morning and was delighted to tell her father of the third miracle, that saved her from a life of destitution and hardship. The father, who had stayed awake to watch had to acknowledge that he had no idea from whence that saving grace had come. And so had to rejoice with all his daughters at the blessings they had received. And so, to this day, we remember Nicholas with those little bags of chocolate gold coins, which we sometimes find in our stockings that we have hung in front of our fireplace.

Nicholas becomes famous for his kindness toward children and his anonymous gift-giving (illustrated in the story above), from which we get the tradition of children getting presents "from Santa Claus."* As with other popular saints, many other stories arise about Nicholas. Some say that he saved the people of Myra from starvation during a famine, for example.** They also say he preached the gospel in a way that ordinary folk could understand it easily, and that he helped the poor and any who were in need, which is, in my opinion, truly saintly! In short, that he cared well for the people of Myra.

Nicholas has something in common with our patron, Clement, as both are saints of

seafarers. England, a great seafaring nation, had at one point some 400 churches named for Nicholas.*** But it is the Dutch who bring the name “Sinterklaus,” or “Santa Claus” to the New World. Nicholas is often depicted wearing his bishop’s attire, in his case, red with white trim, and with a white beard showing both his age and wisdom. It doesn’t take much imagination to see how these evolved into the big red coat and stocking hat that we see today. And, I imagine the Dutch were already representing him in winter attire, with his feast day being in December.

I’m not sure when Nicholas migrated from sunny Myra to the North Pole. Surely, Clement Clarke Moore’s poem, *Twas the Night Before Christmas*, had a lot to do with how we imagine Saint Nicholas today, arriving by a flying sleigh, led by Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen. And maybe Coca-cola has something to do with how we picture Santa Claus today as well.

Yet, some things about Santa still bring us back to Saint Nicholas’ true roots. The candy cane, for example, which is shaped to resemble a bishop’s staff. We do know that Nicholas was for a time imprisoned for his faith, under Emperor Diocletian, and that he had been subsequently freed when Constantine had ascended to the throne. We know he made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. And that he may have been present at the Council of Nicaea. Saint Nicholas is also the patron saint of several countries, including most famously Greece. We know he was holy. And that he gave generously for the needs of others.

I’ll end with the prayer we say on his feast day:

"Almighty God, in your love you gave your servant Nicholas of Myra a perpetual name for deeds of kindness both on land and sea: Grant, we pray, that your Church may never cease to work for the happiness of children, the safety of sailors, the relief of the poor, and the help of those tossed by tempests of doubt or grief; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."

As always, I welcome your feedback: frpatrick@scbythesea.org

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Patrick

* Here I am indebted to James Kiefer.

** See <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/bishop-of-myra/>

*** Holy Women, Holy Men, Celebrating the Lives of the Saints (New York: Church Publishing, 2010), Pg. 104-105

12/12/2024

Themes...

You've no doubt noticed that each of these weeks of Advent has its own particular theme. For the four weeks of Advent those themes are: hope, peace, joy, and love. Now those are pretty good themes on which to reflect. But I wonder if you've been able to feel any of them in this season, which can be so frantic and frenetic with shopping and preparing. Christmas will soon be here, and our anxiety tends to rise during these weeks of Advent. So, I invite you to pause for just a moment now, and allow your hope, your peace, your joy and your love to arise in you. And even if it only lasts a moment, at least you will have had that much Advent.

Hope...generally we think of hope as being associated with looking to a future reality with optimism. Imagining that, in time, all will be well. Because at the end of the day, God shall prevail, in spite of what things might look like today. We begin Advent with a focus upon the Second Coming of Christ, when all things will be put aright. That our place with him is assured (Lk 21:27-28). But that future reality isn't the only kind of hope that Christians carry. Do we not hope that Christ is coming to us even now? That we encounter him in those around us. That he inspires us with hope in our every day, in our lives and in our relationships. We have hope in the inbreaking of God's Kingdom in our midst in ways both big and small even now.

Do you know people who are seemingly always filled with hope? They can occasionally be let down, but their faith is undiminished. Their souls are resolute. They exude happiness. Wouldn't you like to be like that all the time? To be hopeful is a great blessing.

Peace...generally we think of peace as an absence of war or conflict. And don't we all want that for our world? Of course, we do. Thus, we strive to be peacemakers. But what of our inner peace. Are we at peace within ourselves? Or is there a war raging within? Mother Theresa famously said, "if you don't live it, you can't give it." So, how can we inspire peace in others, how can we have peace within our relationships, if we have no peace within ourselves? On Sunday, we'll hear about that kind of peace in our reading from St. Paul's

letter to the Philippians, where he writes, “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (4:6-7). You might say, “don’t worry, be happy!” as Bobby McFerrin sings in his famous song. Of course, that's easier said than done. But consider Paul’s advice. Lay those things that cause such anxiety into Christ’s hands. Give those things with which you struggle over to God, and then yield to God’s will. Ask, give thanks, and then yield, trusting God and God’s purposes. Peace will follow.

Do you know anyone who seems always at peace? Everyone else is freaking out around them. Yet, they remain a calm, non-anxious presence. Don’t you want to be more like that?

Joy...generally joy is a feeling associated with childhood, isn’t it? Too few adults that I know talk about their joys, which is regrettable. Maybe that is why Jesus said we must receive the Kingdom “like a child” (Mk 10:15, Mt 18:3). That is, joyfully, receive the Kingdom (even Christ himself) as a gift, not earned but given, that fills us with gratitude and joy. Those two things are related, gratitude and joy. They say we can’t always be joyful, but we can be grateful, and in my experience, gratitude leads to joy. When we consider all for which we should be grateful, our very lives, our families and friends, our work, our play, our freedoms, the whole of creation, our daily bread, our many capabilities, our faith and faith community...I could go. I’m sure you have your own lists of gratitude. And if you don’t perhaps this would be a good time to start creating one. Recently, I was challenged to take a picture every day of one thing for which I was grateful, one thing or person or whatever that gave me joy. If you are struggling at the end of the day to remember the things for which you are grateful to God, use that phone you have in your pocket and each day take a photo of just one of those moments when you feel joy, and then review those photos at the end of the day.

Do you know someone who is usually joyful? Don’t you want to be more joyful? What are the things for which you are particularly grateful that, if you thought about them more, might inspire more joy in you?

Love...generally when we see the word, love, perhaps we immediately think of romantic love, Valentines Day kind of love. But there are many kinds of love. CS Lewis famously names four. For me, the love that I tend to think about in relation to Christ is “agape.” That is, self-giving, self-sacrificing love, that has the good of the other always at its heart. This is the kind of love we think about coming down to us at Christmas. This one who is

incarnated and embodies God's unconditional love for us, in everything he says and does. Always our good is his purpose. We yearn to emulate that love in our own lives, in the way we live for others and not just for our own selfish ambitions. Isn't it a gift when we can turn our attention away from ourselves and think about the needs of those around us, if only for short time? Perhaps this is the love that drives us to find the "perfect gift" for the ones we love. But it is also the love that inspires in us generosity. That loving concern for another becomes prayer within us, and leads to acts of compassion and mercy that transform our world, especially for the poor, the hungry, the unhoused, and the homebound, the lonely stranger and the long missed friend. Through these acts of love we experience just a little bit of that Kingdom about which our Lord spoke so often. They say of love that it is the only thing you can keep giving away and giving away and you'll have even more of it when you've finished than we you began.

Do you know someone who embodies that kind of love? Who pours themselves out for others and seemingly never tires of doing so? What a joy that must be. I pray your Advent is marked by these themes: hope, peace, joy, and love.

As always, I welcome your feedback: frpatrick@scbythesea.org

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Patrick

12/19/2024

Nativity...

There are some places in this world that I'll not soon forget, but there are also places I don't think I'll ever forget. The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem is one of latter. The birthplace of our Lord is remarkable, at least it was for me, and seemingly for many of the millions who have visited. I had so looked forward to being there again this past February, and bringing several of you too, but our spiritual pilgrimage to the land of the Holy One was cancelled by conflict, which sadly continues. I'm sure the sufferings of those Palestinian Christians living in Bethlehem, which were already substantial, are far worse today. Please pray for them, as we approach Christmas.

As I've mentioned to you before, Bethlehem is a name which means, "House of Bread" in Hebrew. And it is a fitting title for the birthplace of the one who is "the Bread that came

down from Heaven to give life to the world” (Jn 6:33) The church constructed upon this holy site is the oldest church in continual use in all of Christendom. The original church consisting of two structures: a double colonnaded basilica which abutted and, in a sense, pointed to an octagonal shrine which was built over the grotto where Jesus was born.* That church, built by Constantine in the 4th century, was largely destroyed just a couple of hundred years later. A new church, which incorporated those two structures into one, was built in the 6th century by Emperor Justinian. That church still stands and is one of the holiest places I’ve ever been.

Parts of Constantine’s original structure have recently been excavated. There are places in the current church’s flagstone floor which have been removed and a few feet down, stunningly beautiful mosaic floors from Constantine’s Basilica have been uncovered. Even aspects of the “new” church have been uncovered which had been lost during its approximate 1400 year history. For example, the upper walls of the current church were adorned with mosaic angels during the Crusader period (12th century). Six of these angels were known. But, a seventh was recently discovered beneath the plaster and uncovered. These splendid angels point the visitor to the holy place, to the grotto, where Christ was born.

Today, the main altar area sits atop that grotto. To access it, you enter an antechamber to the right of the main altar, and go down a few rounded steps, through the small door, and into the cave. I make that sound easy; it really isn’t. The crush of the crowd can make those steps perilous. But once you are inside, you have space and a moment to be in that holy place. That place where heaven touched earth, where Christ was born.

There is another altar there, and underneath it a brilliant silver star, an allusion to the star that guided the magi to the exact spot where Jesus was born. And a few feet away is a manger. Nothing really separates you from that star. Many reach out and touch it, humbling kneeling. Was this where the shepherds were when, sent by angels, they came to looking for the child? Is there where the magi knelt to pay him homage?

That star is unique, as it features fourteen points. This reflects the genealogy that we find in Matthew’s Gospel. Fourteen generations from Abraham to King David (also from Bethlehem), fourteen generations from David to the Exile, fourteen generations from the Exile to Jesus, the Messiah (Mt 1:17), the one who would restore us from our true exile, bringing us back to God.

I mention above that the place where Christ was born is a grotto. Perhaps you’re asking

yourself, "Wasn't Jesus born in a stable?" So, this is perhaps the most surprising part of Bethlehem for those from the West. It is a matter of translation and tradition and the way we live. Luke only tells us: "While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (2:6-7). So we assume the kind of cattle shed we might find in our part of the world.

But, in Jesus' time, homes in Bethlehem more typically would have been hewn in rock. Further, animals weren't kept in some barn out in the field, but rather in a lower section of one end of the home. The family, and guests, lived and slept in a slightly upper space, and the animals in the lower part, near the door to be led out by their owner in the morning.** If it is helpful, you can still think of the door as a barn door. At any rate, the grotto is that lower part of the house, upon which the church above was built.

The Church of the Nativity has seen many challenges over the centuries. Risks of destruction from invading armies. Looting. Neglect. Damage from the elements. The main doors were originally quite large but a much smaller door was installed instead, "called the door of humility," requiring those visiting to bow down to enter. Today, the main altar area features a splendid iconostasis, along with many hanging sanctuary lamps, which for me symbolize the Light that came into our world.

Everything about the place feels right. One can imagine the whole scene unfolding, Mary, Joseph, and then Jesus, the angels, the shepherds and their sheep, the ox, the ass, even the magi. One can sense in this darkened, humble, simple space, that the Light of the World came to us. Not in a palace or even what we might think of today as a decent dwelling, but here in the lower part of a simple home, born to a family humble and poor but faithful, with nowhere else to go and only their love to give to this Child, who was, and is, and ever will be, the Messiah.

As always, I welcome your feedback: frpatrick@scbythesea.org

A blessed Advent, Christmas and Epiphany to all.

Fr. Patrick

* https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/article/the-life-of-jesus-written-in-stone/?_gl=1*cw8bcp*_gcl_au*MjEzNTM2MjY0OC4xNzM0NTcwODk2*_ga*MTMyMzQ5MjU5My4xNzM0NTcwODk2*_ga_7MSGCYKLB3*MTczNDY0NTcxOC4yLjAuMTczNDY0NTcxOC42MC4wLjE1MDIyODQ1Nzc.

** For a really great description, see, Kenneth E. Bailey, Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the

1/2/2025

Star...

I pray that this new year is filled with blessings for you and those you love. This Sunday, we'll celebrate the Epiphany. That is, the arrival of the Magi to Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, and their bringing of those gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Of course, what prompts their pilgrimage to Bethlehem is the appearance of that star, which they interpret (correctly, I would add) as announcing the birth of the new king, and in this case, the Savior of all the world. I'll elaborate on this and some other aspects of the story on Sunday. Here I want to focus upon the star.

Many have puzzled about that "star." For Matthew's story suggest that the Magi or kings, followed the star, and it led them seemingly to the exact location of the holy family. That's usual behavior for a star, which generally doesn't move. Well, stars actually do move - a little - in what is called proper motion.¹ And the universe is expanding. Gravitational forces also can have some impact on stars. But for the most part, these changes are almost imperceptible to us on earth, which is why constellations don't really seem to change. Stars usually are constant.

Stars do rise and set however. A good example is our own star, the sun, which rises in the East and sets in the West, because of our earth's rotation. The sun doesn't actually rise or set but from our perspective, it does. This is true for the other stars that seem to traverse our sky. They rise in the East and set in the West. Is this what led those wise ones to disembark from "the East," and "follow" the star to the place of its setting in the West (over Judea), perhaps.

But, what can explain the star's "appearance?" And what about that appearance was remarkable? This has led some to suggest that it wasn't a star at all, but rather a planet or other celestial body. Planets do move in orbits around our sun (at least the ones in our solar system do). Other objects do too, like comets. Some have speculated that the "star" was actually a comet. This idea finds musical expression in the popular carol, "Do you hear what I hear," which includes the lyric, "a star, a star, dancing in the night, *with a tail as big as a kite.*"²

That sounds like a comet, which have tails. And a comet can appear and stay around for a little while, as it passes by us on its journey to or away from our sun. Others have

suggested that there was a planetary alignment that year that appeared as a single, bright star to those on earth.

However, what's stranger still is that the star leads the Magi. That is "proceeds them" on their journey. Of course, mariners have been marking the location of stars, especially the North Star which, while not the brightest star is very constant, to determine their own course for millennia. Yet, this only gives you a relative location and a slight difference can land you far from where you intended to go. Is this why the Magi arrive in Jerusalem and not Bethlehem, which is close but still about 5-6 miles further South? Probably not.

The wise men intentionally went to the logical place, the seat of power, where Judean kings resided. They didn't know the prophecies of where the Messiah was to be born in all likelihood. And their pronouncement of a new born king creates an awkward interaction with the sitting king.

According to Matthew, once the Magi are redirected from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, the star that they had seen at its rising seems to guide them right to the place of Jesus' birth. It even "stops" over that place, and we can image gives its light directly to the place where they find the holy child. Now that is certainly peculiar behavior for any star. Some Christian traditions even claim that the star fell to the earth directly where the child was (but that raises quite a lot of other questions which we cannot address here). While some of this seems impossible to us who live in a scientific age and know something about stars, we can say, as our Lord did, "what is impossible for man, is possible for God" (Lk 18:27).

We also say and believe that the "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and that the Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1:1, 14). This also seemed impossible for many. But it happened!

My own thoughts on the star are these: I believe firstly that all things are possible for God. We can understand its appearance literally. I also think we can see metaphorical reason for Matthew's inclusion. Just as angels (who appear in the night sky) announce the Savior's birth to the shepherds in Luke's telling, so does the star announce our Lord's birth to the nations. That is to say that even creation joyous proclaims his arrival, the mystery of the Word made flesh, or as the carol puts it, "Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing."³ Indeed, for Matthew's audience, many thought of stars not as mere objects but as celestial beings.⁴ And so to understand them like the angels, doing God's will, in announcing Christ's birth seems quite fitting.

To some, angels appeared, to others, a star. This may well have been Matthew's point of view. And it calls these wise ones to seek this child. In the midst of all this speculation, we might miss the greater point, that the true “star” of Bethlehem is Jesus. That he is our true North Star, and the one by whom we calibrate our lives and our direction.

As always, I welcome your feedback: frpatrick@scbythesea.org

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Patrick

1 <https://www.astronomy.com/science/do-the-stars-move-in-the-sky/>

2 Lyric by Noel Regney in “Do you hear what I hear,” 1962.

3 O Come All Ye Faithful, #83 in *Hymnal 1982*

4 <https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/article/what-was-the-star-that-guided-the-magi/>

1/9/2025

Remembering St. Mark’s...

Today, we hear from Fr. Brad who posted the following on his very excellent blog, which you can find [here...](#)

**Remembering St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, Altadena, CA
(which burned to the ground in the Eaton Canyon Fire yesterday, January 8, 2025)**

I remember:

*January 1963. I attended St. Mark’s for first time with the Key Club of Pasadena High School. We visited a different house of worship each month. The next month we visited The Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center on Altadena Drive, which also burned to the ground yesterday.

*Sitting in a front pew with our advisor John Stewart. As a Presbyterian at that time, I learned that I had no clue about standing, sitting, and kneeling in the service, but Mr. Stewart, an Episcopalian, quietly coached us.

*Meeting the Rector, Father Bob Cornelison, at St. Mark’s. He was handsome, thirty-four-years old, jet-black hair that matched his cassock. Little did I know that this man would change the course of my life and shape my ministry as a priest.

*Returning to worship at St. Mark’s with my high school girl friend. It was a way I could be with her more often.

*Transitioning from my Presbyterian roots to the mystery and ritual of the Eucharist, God awakened in me a deep longing for the presence of Jesus in that liturgy.

*Witnessing Father Bob's announcement in 1965 that he was going to Selma, Alabama to march with Dr. King after the violent assaults on Bloody Sunday. I was afraid for him, but off he went. Two weeks later he returned and shared his experience of marching with Dr. King, and his own visceral feelings of fear and dread, as they marched through taunting, rock-throwing crowds. And my life changed forever; something stirred within me. I wanted to live my life like Father Bob.

*Estranged from my parents, St. Mark's became my family. I taught two-dozen third graders in the Sunday School. There was an open window in the back of the classroom. I had to be vigilant, because the boys were always trying to escape the class out that window.

*Singing in the choir. I had a weak voice, but that experience deep within the action of the liturgy fed my love for this congregation.

*Learning about the Pepper Project, the low-income housing project sponsored by St. Mark's in the historic Black neighborhood of northwest Pasadena. The parish transitioned from being a traditionally white congregation to being a welcoming and inviting parish to the Black Community.

*Leaving for seminary in Berkeley, CA, in 1967, encouraged by Father Bob and sponsored by St. Mark's for ordination.

*Grieving the death of my mother, who died on Easter Day 1989, and celebrating her Requiem at St. Mark's Church.

We are reminded that a church is more than a building; it is the people of God who worship there. At the same time, when I would visit St. Mark's in later years, wherever I looked within the church: the pulpit, the choir stalls, the memorial windows, the Blessed Sacrament, conjured precious memories and deep gratitude for how St. Mark's drew me into the loving arms of Jesus and sent me forth as a priest into the world.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Brad