

The Good News

St. Mary's Church, 258 Concord Street, Newton Lower Falls, MA 02462

617-527-4769 Email: office@st-marys-episcopal.org

March 5, 2010

MARY MEIER, 75

Mary Meier, a long-time, devoted member of St. Mary's died on February 21 of pneumonia and cancer. After retiring from *The Boston Globe* in 2001 where she was a reporter for 40 years, she retired to Madison, New Hampshire with her husband Sepp.

I remember a Sunday service when Peter Chase sat giggling to himself while seated in the chancel pew. Afterward, I asked him what was so funny. He replied that earlier he was in his office prayerfully preparing himself for the Eucharist when Mary walked through and made an observation so salty it doesn't bear repeating in *The Good News*. Peter loved it. Then there was the Sunday when Mary arrived at church, *Globe* in hand. Apparently the sermon was not to her liking because midway through, she simply resumed reading her newspaper. Finally I recall a weekend family retreat at Camp O-AT-KA. We were participating in the Holy Eucharist in the open-air, rustic chapel. One family had brought their rather large dog with them. The dog started wandering around the aisle, whereupon Mary promptly marched the dog outside and returned to her seat. You always knew where you stood with her.

This week Mary was variously described by fellow congregants as "very dedicated to St. Mary's and in church every Sunday," "eccentric," "hilarious," "outspoken and often holding a strong contrarian view," "opinionated" and "very concerned." During the Search Committee's trip to Utah to interview Peter Chase, she hiked in the Arches National Park with Al Robinson. When Boise Robinson, a larger-than-life, mirthful, renowned architect, who created the gray-green paint color that covers the woodwork at St. Mary's and redesigned the reredos, died, Mary's extensive obituary in the *Globe* captured the full measure of the man.

For much of her career, Mary played a key role in the *Ask the Globe* column. Her obituary noted that "...her knowledge of trivia was boundless. She was an encyclopedia for people who couldn't afford one." One can imagine her holding her own on the City Desk.

—Tim Green

Roman Catholicism as Seen Through the Eyes of a Rabbi

Editor: The following article was adapted from a sermon preached by Rabbi Ron Weiss, Rabbi-in-Residence on Sunday, February 28.

I would like to tell you of a book I read this past summer. The book was by someone whom I admire greatly, and it had a strong influence on me. James Carroll, as I think most of you know, is the author of *Constantin's Sword*, *House of War* and many other books. He once was a priest at Boston University and then he left to become a writer and later a columnist for the *Boston Globe*. The book of this past summer was called *Practicing Catholic* and because of this book I created a series of four classes on Judaism and Christianity that I taught in the fall at Temple Beth Eholim where I had served for a quarter century.

I should also tell you that in my judgment, James Carroll is my kind of Catholic: he is liberal, he is loyal to the church whose leaders have almost all rejected him and he is strongly opposed to the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.

I think I should also say to you that one of the reasons I am proud to live in this area, aside of course, from St. Mary's of which I am very proud, is because of St. John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church, which is a close neighbor of yours, and because that church is the home of the *Voice of the Faithful*, an organization of Catholics who have attempted to move the larger Catholic church kicking and screaming into the 21st century. It's difficult to tell yet what impact they have had, but they represent an aspect of the Roman church that allows

us to know that the church is not monolithic, but in fact, like every religion that I am familiar with, it represents a spectrum running from highly conservative to ultra-liberal, with all the stops in between. As I say, this is true of every religion: Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, so that it makes it very difficult to speak in general terms of any religious tradition. One only needs as an example the Episcopal Church in Massachusetts or elsewhere in the US to see how wide is the spectrum, and how diverse is the make-up of your church.

I grew up in Chicago in a neighborhood that was largely Jewish. It was, however, a time when Jews were not admitted to many clubs, when many colleges and universities had quota systems and when many corporations refused to hire Jews despite their qualifications. I think that what I want you to understand is that as a young person, I had many reasons to fear Christianity. That I did not grow up fearful is probably due to two factors: first the superb education I received at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, which taught me to respect and to see great value in a tradition where, from a Jewish point of view, there is great alienation, and second, once I became a rabbi, I was fortunate to meet many Christians who were worthy of my admiration and appreciation.

Anyway, when John XXIII became pope in 1958, he issued a call for a council that would bring the Catholic church into the 20th century. One of the more significant accomplishments of that council was the effort to change the historic anti-Semitism of the Church. They did this by acknowledging that the Jews of both ancient and contemporary times were not responsible for the death of Jesus, and that the accounts of his death are not to be considered historically accurate documents. Rather they are teachings that are based in faith. This was, in my judgment, a great leap forward. However, every pope who has held office since John XXIII has attempted to back-track on his liberalizing accomplishments. This includes Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul I, Pope John Paul II, and it also includes the current pope, Benedict XVI. And this reality I find very sad.

Nonetheless, I can tell you that after WWII, a number of Christians, laywomen and men, both Protestant and Catholic clergy and academics, concluded that the traditional anti-Semitism of the Christian church, while it was not responsible for the Holocaust, had over the centuries laid the groundwork well for what occurred in Europe. It is true that some Christians in Europe murdered Jews, and there were Christians who stood silent while Jews were being prepared for murder, but there were also Christians who risked their own lives and those of their families in order to save Jews. We know all of this today.

But after the war was over, a small number of Christians, having concluded that Christianity was less than they would like it to be, sought to develop a finer Christianity; one that could be a truer representation of God, one that would not need to put down others in order to raise themselves up. The people who led and who today are active in this effort constitute a very small percentage of Christians, but I would say that their influence has been far greater than their numbers. I think it is safe to say that St. Mary's, by virtue of having a Rabbi-in-Residence, has had a profound impact on the life of our community. I have chosen to identify with this work, and in fact it has become a major theme of my own life; that more Christians and Jews need to know of this effort, and that all of us are children of the only God there is, for there is no Jewish God, or Christian God, or Muslim God, and that God hopes we will be good to one another, and that God does not hate any of us.

James Carroll speaks in his book of the abuse of altar boys within the Roman Catholic Church. When the *Boston Globe* first exposed the local church, it showed that local cardinals knew of some priests' criminal behavior, and I am speaking not of homosexuality, which is not a crime, but of Cardinal Medeiros and Cardinal Law, both of whom knowingly transferred priests to other parishes within the diocese, when these priests were guilty of molesting children. At that time the church hierarchy made a decision to defend the guilty priests who were trusted by much of the Catholic laity rather than side with the men and women, girls and boys who were the victims of these priests. Another way of putting the issues is that the Vatican hierarchy chose the path of power rather than that of love, which I believe is the true message of all religions.

When this issue first became public, I asked a local psychiatrist to meet with our temple staff. I felt it was necessary for us to discuss the issue of staff touching congregants. Touching is a very important part of my communication with people. I believe very strongly in hugging and kissing and did so frequently with congregants. Because of the behavior of some priests, we as a group decided that displays of affection should only take place in public and never in private.

Somewhat later, when Paul Shanley was convicted in Boston of pedophilia, Cardinal Law was forced to resign and he was very promptly assigned by the Vatican to a high position in Rome at one of its ancient churches, St. Mary Major. If Cardinal Law had remained in Boston, it is very likely that he would have been sent to prison. And I think it is an understatement to say that the Roman Catholic population of New England was deeply angry at the Vatican. I am angry also. But I recognize that the Church is much more than what the Vatican proclaims or does. I am deeply disappointed in the pope, in his leadership and in the behavior of people that recent popes have appointed. I am also aware that there are Catholics like Jim Carroll, like John Pawlikowski, like Gregory Baum, like many people that I know in the Wellesley area. And there are priests who have remained in the priesthood who have raised their voices against the hierarchy and have been punished because of this. I bless these people for they have struggled to make American Catholicism much better than it is.

Let me say a word to you about the role of women. No religion not Jewish, or Protestant, or Catholic has any right to be very proud of its history. Of the three, I would say that the Roman Catholic Church has done more to limit the role of women than any of the others. Judaism, excepting Orthodox Judaism, has ordained women and made use of their talents. A number of Protestant groups have also advocated much more public roles for women including ordination. The Catholic Church has lagged far behind other religions in this critical area.

Pope John XXIII effected a number of changes in the Church that were intended to move the Church into modern times. Among these was the hope that Catholic women would be able to move forward in the church and that those who wanted to would be able to serve the church in far more active roles than they had previously been allowed. It was a time of great hope within the church. That hope was cut short by the death of Pope John, and then by the actions of every succeeding pope. Each pope who came after John, up to an including the resent pope, Benedict XVI, made clear that women would not and could not become priests; that no model of women priests existed within the church. None of the disciples were women, (and none were Irish either), although women were both very close to Jesus and played critical roles in the early church. In modern life we have seen how women have moved forward in every area of public life, business, sports, religion, all the professions. I would say that what we are witnessing is a retrograde movement within the Catholic Church. It has its origins in sexuality, and it touches both priestly celibacy and restrictions on methods of birth control, both of which are very largely ignored, and both of which are issues over which the Church exercises power, rather than the moral issues that they pretend to be.

There is much more in the book that deserves comment, but I want to commend Jim Carroll's book *Practicing Catholic* to you. It is well worth the time of any non-Catholic.

Lenten Adult Forum Series on Lent's Spiritual Landscape on Sundays through March 21 at 11:15 a.m. in the Chapter Room

In our Ash Wednesday Liturgy, our Book of Common Prayer invites us "in the name of the Church to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination." This year, we will live out that invitation by exploring Lent's spiritual landscape together during our Adult Forum starting at 11:15 a.m. Please join us to reflect on the theme of the week and discover its relevance for our 21st century daily living: March 7, *Prayer*; March 14, *Forgiveness*; March 21, *Practicing Resurrection*.

For those who missed the second Adult Forum, we are providing the following Executive Summary of the *Yearning* portion of the *Yearning, Temptation and Sin* class:

I invited us to look at these three aspects of our human life together this week because I think that we Christians get mixed up between healthy appetites and unhealthy appetites. The materialistic culture that we live in wants us to believe that we need to be cocooned in perfect contentment with all of our needs and wishes met before we can be satisfied. Years of advertising and material overabundance have left most of us in Western American culture believing that if we want something, we deserve to get it right away, and if we can't or don't get it, there is either something unfair at work, or we are somehow at fault; we are not good enough, or rich enough, or lucky enough to have it.

There are a lot of problems with this materialistic training, but one of the most obvious problems is that our secular culture teaches us that wanting or needing something is somehow unbearable and wrong. *That my friends, is a lie.* We do not need the most expensive breakfast cereal, or car, or home or vacation to be fully, passionately alive and vital and loved. But when we live out of that place which tells us that we need to be fully satiated in order to feel well, we distrust the feelings of “wanting” and “yearning” inside of us. We imagine that only when we are “full” i.e., full of food or things, can we feel “good” or “okay.”

I want to suggest that “yearning” is a vital and important part of the process of soulful living. I believe that we are meant to be able to tolerate, and even thrive, with profoundly important things not yet fully realized in our lives. I want to suggest that being able to “yearn” well actually equips us to be able to dream and hope well. We can’t build or create something new without the ability to yearn for what isn’t yet real or physically present. Furthermore, that ability to yearn, that discipline to make room in our hearts or our dreams or our lives for what isn’t yet true, is one of the things that enables us to develop our mature Christian souls.

Most of the time, when we are making important decisions, we actually need to make room—to create an empty place—for what we most want in our lives before we can discover what belongs there. We see this played out most particularly in the adoption process, when parents undergo an enormous amount of yearning and dreaming before the child is finally placed in their arms, but we see this with physical pregnancy, too. People wait for nine to ten months before a child is born. We also find that any social movement that has dreamed of creating something which is truly more just or truly more loving takes a long time to develop. You are not an insatiable machine to be filled, you are a human being of dignity being called into relationship with me and other humans.

I hear the Magnificat being both “bad news” and “vitally critical good news” for the rich. And Robert Browning tells us, “Man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s a heaven for?”

Prayer List

Prayers are asked for Bishop Bud Cederholm, Beulah, Brian, Darlene, David, Don, Dorothy, Elisabeth, Elizabeth, Georgi, Henry, Jennifer, Jerri, Jon, Joshua, June R., The Walter Kennedy Family, Kenneth, Kurt, Liz, Margaret, Mary Ellen, Pat, Peter, Sally and Vince.

Upcoming Events

Special Music Sunday on March 14 at 10:00 a.m.

Cantata BWV 106; Gottes Zeit ist der allerbeste Zeit (God’s Own Time is the Best of All) by J. S. Bach (1685-1750)

In celebration of the 325th anniversary of Bach’s birth, the St. Mary’s Adult Choir, soloists and guest instrumentalists will perform Cantata BWV 106. This cantata, known as *Actus tragicus*, is an early composition, probably written by Bach in 1707 for his uncle’s funeral. It is scored for two recorders, two violas *da gamba* and *continuo*. The text consists of Biblical passages and verses from existing hymns, addressing the theme of human mortality and, at the same time, reminding us of God’s continuing presence with us. During the first half of the 18th century, the most important form of Protestant church music was the cantata. Bach wrote cantatas for every Sunday of the Church Year, as well as for special services. The cantata was performed following the Gospel reading, either before or after the Sermon, as a sung proclamation of the Word of God. Cantata 106 will be performed as the musical centerpiece of our service on March 14. Please join us next Sunday for this special Lenten meditation in song.

Wellesley Interfaith Food Drive for the Month of March

During the past 18 months, the Wellesley Food Pantry has seen a significant increase in demand for their services. More than 200 families are in need of help. Starting Sunday, February 28, in a town-wide effort, 12 houses of worship will be collecting designated items. (St. Mary’s has been assigned vegetable oil and mayonnaise or a \$10.00 gift card from Roche Bros.) For more information, contact Elisabeth Comer at ewcomer@verizon.net.

Editor: Tim Green