

Daily Prayer

Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers

Wednesday, January 13, 2021

We enter into a time of quiet. We offer to God our selves and in the silence know that God embraces us as God's very own. We offer our hopes and our concerns through our prayers and in the silence listen for God. Today we hold in our prayers the ordinary moments in life—the trials and the joys.—and remember Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, Teacher of the Faith (367).

We begin by saying

Because I live, you will live also; you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

John 14.19-20

The First Reading

Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well. Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 1.13-14, 2.1-3

The Psalm

Rulers have persecuted me without a cause, *

but my heart stands in awe of your word.

I am as glad because of your promise *

as one who finds great spoils.

As for lies, I hate and abhor them, *

but your law is my love.

Seven times a day do I praise you, *
because of your righteous judgements.
Great peace have they who love your law; *
for them there is no stumbling block.
I have hoped for your salvation, O Lord, *
and I have fulfilled your commandments.
I have kept your decrees *
and I have loved them deeply.
I have kept your commandments and decrees, *
for all my ways are before you.

Psalm 119.161-168

The Gospel Reading

'And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say.'

Luke 12.8-12

We continue with the reflection that follows. In silence, we ask what the reading has to say to us today. Is there something in the reflection that draws us more deeply into the reading? What does God have to say to us? What do we have to ask God?

The Reflection

Paul MacLean with additional text from For All the Saints



The building at the top is the baptistery of St. Jean, dating from the 4th century and regarded as the oldest religious edifice in France. The one beneath is dedicated to Notre Dame and is from 11th century. It has one of the finest surviving Romanesque facades in Europe.

These are two of the many old churches in Poitiers, home to St Hilary, a 4th century bishop and doctor of the church whom we commemorate today. We were visiting this city in the summer of 1972 on a holiday in which we were tracing one of the medieval pilgrimage routes to Compostela as it wound its way through France. The massive number of pilgrims had a major economic impact along this route: monasteries and cities vied to be included by acquiring saints' relics and building shrines and great churches. For those of us living in the then 20th century, the result was a wealth of Romanesque architecture and medieval history and artifacts to be explored.

But there were more pressing things on my mind that day as we stood outside an ancient church with its vivid expressions of medieval faith carved in stone. Some weeks earlier I had interviewed for a curacy at a church in the north west of England,

and although the two day round of meetings had gone well in everyone's estimation, I hadn't heard any conclusion for some time and was beginning to lose the hopes that had buoyed me up. Now after much worrying at the issue in the midst of the medieval treasures of Poitiers, we made our way to the bank of phones at the Post Office, and put in the call that would determine our fate for the next three years. It hadn't occurred to me at the time that the priest to whom I was speaking about my appointment and who would become a mentor and friend for the ensuing decades, had been born on a January 13th, and was thereby named by his pious father 'St Hilary'. With a confirmation that all was well and we would eventually settle in a most interesting and welcoming English parish for the coming years, we were able to resume our French pilgrimage inspired holiday with relieved and happy hearts.

And so, if you will forgive a bit of personal history intruding into this commemoration, I have a particular fondness for St Hilary and connect both his name and his city of Poitiers with an important event and stage in my life. Far more important of course in Christian history is the role he played as bishop of that city and advocate for orthodox Christian faith against the dominant Arianism of the time. However, Christian history and tradition is made up of small personal events in which God is present to us and which remain as unnoticeable eddies in a much larger stream, as well as in the great figures of the Church whose lives are still remembered, if now summarized into a few pages, and whose writings are still read, if mostly by students of early church history.

What I take from this event, now nearly 50 years ago, is the connection and continuity afforded by the faith that carries our lives along with a sense that we are being looked after. Gazing upon that 4th century baptistry and imagining the struggles that brought the Christian faith to Poitiers at that same time, and the role of Hilary, much loved by his people, in both establishing and

defending that faith, takes in a sweep of history in a moment, and connects us personally with another human being who, 16 centuries earlier, had adopted faith in Jesus and committed his life to following him, likely in that same building. I can't help but feel, somehow, with Arianism soundly defeated, Hilary had the time in the 20th century, with a kindly smile upon his face, to offer a moment of comfort and encouragement to me, a young priest at a critical crossroads.

From: *For All the Saints*

Today we honour Hilary, a bishop and hero of the Catholic faith in fourth-century Gaul. Born and raised in paganism, he inherited great wealth, married and had a daughter, and gained prestige as a public advocate in his native Poitiers, a city in what is now southwestern France. Around the age of thirty, he began to study Christian beliefs in private; his reading and reflection led him to seek baptism in the year 350. The Christians of Poitiers recognized his gifts of mind and character, and two or three years later they elected him as their bishop.

At that time two movements were locked in bitter contest for control of the Church. On one side, the Catholic movement upheld the Nicene Creed, with its affirmation that the Son of God is "of one being with the Father," and insisted that this doctrine was the only possible basis for Christian life and practice.

On the other side, the Arian movement accused the Nicene faith of violating the utter oneness of God. Hilary cast his lot with the Catholics and immediately became a serious irritation to the Arians. They happened to enjoy the favour of the Roman emperor, and their complaints about Hilary's effectiveness in defending Nicene principles provoked the emperor into exiling him from his diocese.

Hilary spent three years in Asia Minor and during this banishment deepened his commitment to orthodox theology. His presence became such an embarrassment to the Arians in the East that they convinced the emperor to banish him again — back to his own diocese of Poitiers. Upon his return Hilary rallied the neighbouring bishops in opposition to Arianism, and before his death on January thirteenth in the year 367 he had turned his entire province into a bastion of the Nicene faith.

When the time is right, we conclude our time of silence with the canticle

The Canticle ~ A Song of God's Grace

Blessed are you,
the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ♦
for you have blest us in Christ Jesus
with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

You chose us to be yours in Christ
before the foundation of the world, ♦
that we should be holy and blameless before you.

In love you destined us for adoption as your children,
through Jesus Christ, ♦
according to the purpose of your will,
To the praise of your glorious grace, ♦
which you freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

In you, we have redemption
through the blood of Christ, ♦
the forgiveness of our sins,

According to the riches of your grace, ♦
which you have lavished upon us.

You have made known to us, in all wisdom and insight, ♦
the mystery of your will,

According to your purpose
which you set forth in Christ, ♦
as a plan for the fullness of time,
To unite all things in Christ, ♦
things in heaven and things on earth.

Ephesians 1.3-10

We continue in prayer for those people and situations that we hold up before God (The Intercessions) and continue with the concluding collect, the Lord's prayer and the closing sentences.

The Intercessions

Let us pray to God,
who alone makes us dwell in safety:

For all who are affected by coronavirus,
through illness or isolation or anxiety,
that they may find relief and recovery:
Lord, hear us, Lord, graciously hear us.

For those who are guiding our nation at this time,
and shaping national policies,
that they may make wise decisions:
Lord, hear us, Lord, graciously hear us.

For doctors, nurses and medical researchers,
that through their skill and insights
many will be restored to health:
Lord, hear us, Lord, graciously hear us.

For the vulnerable and the fearful,
for the gravely ill and the dying,
that they may know your comfort and peace:
Lord, hear us, Lord, graciously hear us.

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.

Merciful Father,
accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our prayers conclude

Lord our God,
you called your servant Hilary
to guard with compassion the good of you Church
and to preserve by his steadfast witness
the fulness of Catholic teaching.
Keep us firm in the faith professed at our baptism
that as your Son made his dwelling with us,
so we may always abide in him;
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

[let us pray as our Saviour taught us,]

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

We conclude

May Christ, who sends us to the nations,
give us the power of his Spirit.

Credits:

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The Psalm: *The Book of Alternative Services*. © The Archbishops' Council 2005 and published by Church House Publishing.

The Canticle: *Common Worship*. © The Archbishops' Council 2005 and published by Church House Publishing.

The Intercessions: Church of England: Coronavirus Resources www.churchofengland.org

The Collect: *For All the Saints Prayers* © 2007, General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada

The Concluding Sentence: *Common Worship: Daily Prayer*. © The Archbishops' Council 2005 and published by Church House Publishing.

The reflection: The Rev'd Paul MacLean and text from *For All the Saints*

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