

**4 Epiphany
Annual Congregational Meeting
February 3, 2019**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

Well, **CONGRATULATIONS** to you ... the people of St. Cyprian's ... for voting this congregation as **FOLIO WEEKLY'S BEST CHURCH IN ST. AUGUTINE!** And notice ... it is **NOT** the **Best SMALL Church** ... it is the **BEST CHURCH!** Thank you for your enthusiasm ... what fun ... what a hoot!

Now before we let this go to our heads, we have to remember that who we are at St. Cyprian's has nothing to do with a contest in a magazine. The fact is that being "church" has nothing to do with being "best." I imagine the most people attending a worshipping community anywhere in this city this morning feel that their church is "best." My feeling is ... if it works for them ... if that church community is the one that gives them life ... then that is the "best" church for them.

Yes, we had a lot of fun, and it was an enthusiastic response to a local magazine's efforts to bolster its market in St. Augustine, but it also got us recognized ... and it got us recognized rather inexpensively ... it was cheap advertising. We may actually have some visitors who will attend our worship looking for a new church community because of St. Cyprian's being Folio Weekly's Best Church. Some of those visitors will like what they see and come back. Others will decide that this isn't for them, and they go forth on their spiritual journey with our blessing. But, in the end, who we are as this congregation of St. Cyprian's has nothing to do with being **BEST** ... it has everything to do with being **CHURCH!**

Now, to the task at hand. I really wish I could preach this morning on the readings from scripture we just heard. The readings are amazingly rich ... the story of the call of Jeremiah; the well-known scripture reading about love from Paul's first letter to the Christians in Corinth; and how Jesus was received when he returned to the synagogue ... the synagogue where he learned about God ... the synagogue in the village in which he grew up ... and at the end of the day they wanted to throw him over a cliff. Those stories are rich, and there is much to contemplate. However, today is the Annual Congregational Meeting Sunday, so my remarks will be going in different direction.

Every Sunday morning, as the congregation gathers in the sanctuary, the Acolyte, the Chalice Bearer, and I put on our vestments in the sacristy. Sometimes it can be a rather chaotic small room with people coming and going. Sometimes there are conversations about families, or travel, or even politics. But about 15 minutes before the service begins the Acolyte, the Chalice Bearer, and I have a moment of prayer. Here is the prayer I pray then:

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, and so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you, and then use us we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (BCP p. 832)

To me, that is the moment that I use to separate the mundane from the exceptional ... the secular from the sacred ... the profane from the holy ... all to prepare myself to lead our worshipping community unencumbered by the thoughts of anything other than this sacred time we spend together. In many ways, that is the thinking behind the ringing of the Tibetan Singing Bowl a few minutes before our worship begins. It is to say that now is the time to put the concerns of the world aside as we listen to Kathy's or Jerry's prepared organ prelude. It is a few moments for all of us to become centered as we enter this holy time as a community of faith.

The structure of our worship service ... opening acclamation, hymn of praise, readings, affirmation of faith, prayers, communion, and blessing ... is referred to as the "liturgy." The word "liturgy" comes from a Greek term which means "public service" or "works of the people." What we are doing here on Sunday morning is our "intensive liturgy." Then, what we do when we go out those doors, is our "extensive liturgy."

Last week, Pastor Deena preached about the "Gifts of the Spirit." She said that the many gifts of the Spirit were alive and well here at St. Cyprian's ... and they were being used for the "common good." After the service I told her that I just might get up in the pulpit this week and say "ditto." Pastor Deena did an excellent job of describing who we are as a church. The fact is that this worship ... this liturgy ... is, indeed, the "works of the people" ... lots of people doing the necessary tasks required to make this a coherent worship service. Lots of people who take turns, sharing responsibilities, teaching and training each other ... and all for the common good. And, even those of you who may think of yourselves as mere observers are also active participants in our liturgy. You sing ... at least most of you do. You pray ... even if it isn't out loud. You share the Peace with each other ... very exuberantly. Every one of you a part of this community in one way or another ... even if this is the first time you've been here.

That is one of the beauties of St. Cyprian's. We are not a large, cathedral size congregation with what appears to be a professional staff doing every function. I know ... I've been there and done that. However, at St. Cyprian's every-day people set the altar, greet us at the door, sing in our choir, read our lessons, carry the cross, and serve us as we share a holy meal. (I say every-day people ... but you are very special every-day people.) That is just for our "intensive liturgy." And, the same is true in our "extensive liturgy" when we cook and serve for Dining With Dignity, or open our cupboards to grab something for the Ecumenical Food Pantry, or when we serve at Coffee Hour, or help with the gardening.

And it doesn't stop there. Many of you have other places and organizations in our greater community where you are using your gifts, and giving of yourselves, for the "common good." Meals on Wheels, mentoring an English-is-a-Second-Language student at Learn to Read,

building houses with Habitat for Humanity, volunteering at substance abuse clinics, serving on boards addressing poverty issues, assisting victims of domestic violence ... and the list goes on and on. That is also “extensive liturgy” ... the “works of the people” ... the “public service” for the “common good” ... that happens when you cross that threshold and walk out the door.

BEST CHURCH? Maybe we just beat the system. Or, maybe we didn't. As much as we might want to think that this is about us, it really isn't ... it is all about God. In reality, God may have concerns on God's agenda of which the people of St. Cyprian's ... including me ... are totally unaware. What we see as “our” mission is really God's mission in which we are invited to participate. Some church seem to have God figured out. They know exactly what God wants them to do. They believe that God has given them the answers. However, we ... the people of St. Cyprian's ... don't have all the answer for everyone. Yet, in that place of not knowing, we are seeking to have a relationship with the One who is the Answer.

Our primary task as this community of faith is to nurture our relationship with God by witnessing ... by observing and then proclaiming ... what we see God is doing in the world. We are the Church ... that is what the phrase “Body of Christ” means. We don't just “go to church.” We are the Church in our “intensive liturgy” so that we can be the Church in our “extensive liturgy.” Our outreach defines the entire life of the church ... it is not just a budgeted item. It is what we at St. Cyprian's try to do all the time. In mission, we, are primarily recipients, not givers. We are engaged with the world because that's where we are going to meet the Holy and be transformed. Whenever we begin to think that we fully understand mission, we are already wrong because we have taken over God's role.

So, let's pat ourselves on the back for being named Folio Weekly's Best Church of St. Augustine. It was a lot of fun. There was an enthusiastic response by the people of St. Cyprian's to the voting. The word “enthusiasm” is another word of Greek origin. It comes from “theos” as in “theology,” and from “enthous” meaning inspired. Essentially, “enthusiasm” literally means “inspired by God.” Yes, you the people of St. Cyprian's are enthusiastic.

So now, let's get down to the business of celebrating God's mighty work in the world ... and especially here at St. Cyprian's. That is what really makes us the **Best Church**.

We need this sacred time together, and we need to separate ourselves from the world long enough to encounter the holy in each other, our lives, and then in the world around us. That is the purpose of the prayer I say each Sunday morning with those who share the Altar with me. That is why we ring a Tibetan Singing Bowl for a few moments to become centered before we worship as a community. Then we can go out into the world and find God there ... in the world ... in the other and in ourselves. And, we can discover what God wants of us in this place at this time.

So, how is that it for an Annual Report? We will hear particulars of the accomplishments of the congregation following the service when we move to the Mission House. In short, the health of

St. Cyprian's is fantastic ... not because of us, but because of the divine presence of God in this place and amongst us.

Amen.