

**6 Pentecost  
July 17, 2022**

**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.**

Before we go to Martha and Mary I would like to report to you about the meeting the Wardens and I had with Bp. Howard earlier this week.

On Monday, July 11, Joe Finnegan, Senior Warden; Melinda Lang Hilsenbeck, Junior Warden; Hugh McClelland, Treasurer; and I met by Zoom with Bp. John Howard, and Canon Allison DeFoor. The wardens had requested this meeting to discuss with Bp. Howard the future of St. Cyprian's, specifically around the issue of clergy leadership after my retirement.

In my opinion ... and I think I echo that of the wardens ... the meeting could not have gone better. First, Bp. Howard was highly complimentary of our ministry at St. Cyprian's.

Secondly, both Bp. Howard and Canon DeFoor assured us that they had no intentions of "changing the culture" of St. Cyprian's, and this was reiterated several times during the meeting.

Thirdly, Bp. Howard has given the Mission Board the authority to conduct a search process for a new vicar ... a search process very similar to that of a church with full parish status.

This search process will be in consultation with Bp. Howard, primarily through Canon DeFoor. Bp. Howard empowered the Mission Board to be the Search Committee for the next vicar. On this coming Thursday, July 21, Canon DeFoor will come to St. Cyprian's for our regularly scheduled July Mission Board meeting. He will explain the search process to the whole Mission Board, and answer questions that members of the Mission Board may have.

Canon DeFoor will also be the celebrant and preacher on the first Sunday in October to explain to the entire congregation this process, and affirm the support of the Diocese of Florida as St. Cyprian's seeks new clergy leadership.

In addition, Bp. Howard and Canon DeFoor have appointed a Deacon to assist in the pastoral responsibilities at St. Cyprian's. The Rev. Steve Seibert, Deacon, who, with his wife Leila live just a couple of blocks from St. Cyprian's, will begin his ministry with us on Sunday, July 31. Steve has been serving as a Deacon at Trinity Parish downtown, and I have been in neighborly discussion with Steve since before his ordination. I look forward to having Steve on our staff at St. Cyprian's ... I think he will fit in well.

So, how does this search process work? As I mentioned, Bp. Howard requested that the Mission Board act as the Search Committee. In that role the Mission Board will develop a profile description of the life and ministry of St. Cyprian's. This will be done with full participation of the members of the congregation through meetings, surveys, and interviews ... everyone who chooses to be involved will have a voice.

Secondly, with the help of Canon DeFoor, this profile will be distributed through a number of channels to potential candidates for the position. This may very well be a national search with candidates from dioceses other than the Diocese of Florida.

Third, the Mission Board, acting as the Search Committee, will examine the resumes of interested candidates, and in consultation with Bp. Howard and Canon DeFoor, will select a number of candidates for further query, and eventually conduct interviews. The Mission Board will then make a recommendation to Bp. Howard of the candidate they have chosen. Bp. Howard said, "I may not select your first choice, but ... "

This search process will take some time ... at least a few months. During that time, Joe Finnegan, as Senior Warden, has lined up supply clergy through the end of 2022.

So, from the standpoint of the retiring Vicar of St. Cyprian's, I am very encouraged. I have already talked to three very well qualified clergy who are interested in being candidates for the position. With a strong foundation in St. Cyprian's Core Values, Mission Statement, and Vision Statement, I have no doubt that this congregation has a strong future.

As I said as I opened these remarks, it is my opinion that this meeting with Bp. Howard and Canon DeFoor could not have gone better.

Now, Martha and Mary.

I've always had a hard time with the story of Martha and Mary. Martha is the one doing the cooking, setting the table, arranging the flowers. Mary is the one that is swooning over Jesus ... listening to his every word. Martha wants to make a good impression, but Mary is so taken with this man that she is oblivious to the tasks that are calling for her attention. Martha is self-righteous in her hustle and bustle and assumes Jesus is on her side ... she asks Jesus to scold Mary and get her to begin doing her share of the work. Instead, Jesus ... in his gentle way ... reprimands Martha for being so distracted, and then affirms Mary for just being still and listening.

Maybe I have a problem with this story because I'm more of a Martha type person. I like to be busy. I like accomplishing projects ... seeing results. I'm a multi-tasker. I've told people that my job is like one of those jugglers we used to see on the old Ed Sullivan Show ... the jugglers with plates spinning on long sticks and just about the time the juggler gets a dozen plates spinning at the same time he looks back at the first plate and it is about to fall off and he goes running down the table to get it spinning again. I think that most people who know me realize this.

I have a hard time just sitting a reading a book ... no matter how good the book is. I like listening to music, but usually while doing something else. I like watching a beautiful sunset, but once the sun goes over the horizon I'm ready for the next thing.

So, when I read this story I'm a little uncomfortable. I think I am more Martha than Mary and I would like the story better if Martha got credit for the work she was doing, and Mary was chastised at least a little for just loafing off.

I want to say that it not an either/or, but rather a both/and. There would be no story without both Martha and Mary ... they need each other to be complete. So, for those of you ... who like me ... tend towards being more Martha we need to make room for Mary. And those of you who identify with Mary ... it is time to get off your duff and do something.

Some people construe the story of Martha and Mary as the tension between the contemplative life and the active life ... the monastic life or a life of social activism ... between prayer on the one hand and doing on the other ... with a definite bias in this story to the contemplative/prayerful life. But I think that is a false dichotomy. I don't believe there is any reason to pit action against contemplation. We need both, and I believe God calls people to both. Instead of contrasting the active and contemplative styles of life, Luke contrasts Martha's "distracted" life ... a word he uses twice ... with Mary's "centered" life.

The Trappist monk Thomas Merton spent twenty-seven years cloistered in Gethsemane Monastery in rural Kentucky. His monastic life of silence and prayer invigorated his prophetic writings that spoke to the entire world ... and that turned him into a paradoxical silent speaker and celebrity in solitude. His solitude and contemplation fostered engagement with the world rather than an escape from reality.

Luke tells the story of Martha and Mary and Jesus as a real world encounter involving three people. However, I also think that the story of Martha and Mary is about an inner struggle ... an inner struggle that we all have experienced. In our lives we have all been visited by a "guest" of sorts that has the potential to lead us to a fuller life. Yet, often, we are so distracted by other things that we fail to take the time to stop and listen to what that "guest" may have to say. Perhaps we are afraid to listen, so we allow the distractions to fill our psyche. Perhaps we know that what we will hear may be painful so we avoid that voice by allowing other voices in our head and heart to speak instead. But this story is telling us there is value in quieting our souls and minds, becoming centered, listening to the "guest" ... even if it is your own voice, and then moving into meaningful action.

For example, my description of the search process is a "Martha" piece of work. So, where is the "Mary" in our own story? St. Cyprian's wouldn't be the church it is today without a lot of work by "Marthas" in the congregation. But what brings us ... and holds us ... together? Our Core Values, and our Mission Statement, and our Vision Statement are the foundation of our life together. They are grounded in our commitment to take seriously what Jesus took seriously.

Our Core Values and Mission and Vision Statements are our understanding that everyone on this planet is a blessed child of a loving God. They proclaim our understanding of the Gospel, and they fuel our expression of faith in this corner of God's vineyard.

So, although the search process will involve lots of "Martha" type tasks ... meetings, surveys, interviews, communications, travel details, and on and on ... there is also the need to ground the process in our faith, and leave room for God's sacred spirit to move and take St. Cyprian's to new horizons.

Yes, I am more like Martha than Mary. I imagine that some of you feel the same way. Yet, I have learned that in the midst of the distractions around me I must ... if I am to be true to myself ... I must take time to quietly listen. Listen so that God's sacred spirit ... often disguised as my own voice ... can speak a truth I've been avoiding.

Rabbi Hillel was a contemporary of Jesus. This is attributed to him: "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?"

Dag Hammarskjold was the Swedish Secretary General of the United Nations from 1953 until he was killed in a plane crash in 1961. He was a world traveler and also an author of some note. He once famously observed that the longest journey is the journey inward. In our age of total information overload, it's "no small struggle" to move from the experience of Martha ... distracted, agitated, and anxious about all going on around her ... to Mary's quiet, centered self, focused on what is going on in her heart and soul.

When we learn to break through the distractions and become centered and quiet we will hear that voice leading us ... however painfully ... into the fullness of life. Then our actions are no longer mere distraction, but have a powerful purpose. This is what it means to take seriously what Jesus took seriously.

I end with a quote from Dag Hammarskjold ... one that I often use as a blessing: "For all that has been, thanks! For all that will be, yes!"

Amen.