

Yesterday I found myself arrested in the midst of a long list of things I was going to do to pause for over three hours to witness the nation come together to remember and honor the late Senator John S. McCain. It was a layering of tributes and remembrances that lifted up the ideals of our nation once more -- ideals that insisted that we could be better and do better--part of the legacy of the man who --in his final months-- planned this service asking family members, political allies, political foes alike to join him at his own funeral in publically presenting an America that could be generous, inclusive, respectful, courageous.

All this took place at the Washington National Cathedral in a service that was awash with stirring music, prayers, eulogy all in the milieu of Episcopal-Anglican liturgical worship --a powerful ethos of worship that drew together disparate peoples even as it draws us together today into the context of prayerful liturgy and holy worship.

I am speaking of the Episcopal ethos: We have an appreciation for paradox and synthesis--a willingness to live with a holy worldliness; to hold in tension the sacred with the secular; one's personal freedom in tension with communal responsibility. We combine Word and Sacrament. We read, hear and reflect upon the Word as a preparation for coming to the holy Table, the place of holy presence in bread and wine. And we pray the scriptures even as we look to holy scripture to inform our living. As Westerhof puts it: *Before decisions are made ... the community gathers in the context of communal prayer and meditation on the Scriptures so that the Holy Spirit might inform and influence our decisions.*

Evelyn Underhill, one of our saints in the Anglican Communion -- in writing about the inner spiritual life--has this to say about the kind of spirituality that is involved in shaping our interior and exterior lives as Episcopalians:

"One's first duty is adoration, and one's second duty is awe, and only one's third duty is service. And that for those three things and nothing else, addressed to God and no one else, you and I and all other countless human creatures evolved upon the surface of this planet were created. We observe

then that two of the three things for which our souls were made are matters of attitude, of relation: adoration and awe. Unless these two are right, the last of the triad, service, won't be right. Unless the whole of your ... life is a movement of praise and adoration, unless it is instinct with awe, the work which the life produces won't be much good [mine]. (See Underhill *Concerning the Inner Life.*)

We are living in a time in which social involvement increasingly is becoming more and more paramount. The world is shrinking. The environment --the biosphere for so many species, including ourselves, is under assault. Yet if we approach the ecological, social or economic issues of our times, the ones that strike us and invite us to respond, how will we be grounded? How will we avoid being consumed by impulses which move us away from our own, best humanity?

Underhill points to two dimensions of a holy worldliness that exist to be spiritual habits nurturing and strengthening our souls. Adoration and awe. These two qualities contain and promote the ability to live in a prayerful awareness of the Thou, the Other, the Mystery, the LORD. Adoration and awe promote the grace to stop in the midst of whatever. They ask us to turn aside and worship--both here as a community of prayer and there wherever your "there" may be. They are essential spiritual duties designed to take prayer as a *pro-forma* part of worship and make prayer a component of a prayerful life. Adoration, awe --two essential duties--and then, grounded in prayer and prayerful awareness, that third duty--the duty of service.

It is as St. Augustine has said: *My life shall be a real life, being wholly full of Thee.* And I remind us this morning of the times which St. Augustine faced when he said this. He lived in North Africa. He served as Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, in the tumultuous time of the decay of the great Roman Empire. The Visigoths, sacked Rome in 410. The Empire was profoundly shaken. The city's walls had not been breached in 800 years. Many in Rome argued that the abandonment of Rome's traditional gods for Christianity was the root of the problem. Augustine pointed out that many basilicas provided refuge for Rome's citizens during the attack. He did so in his last work, *The City of God.*

Augustine saw Rome as an earthly city, a city, like all other cities, eventually destined to pass away. Against the decaying city of Rome he presented the City of God--an eternal place of ultimate consolation, a city that will ultimately prevail.

So here is a man dealing with the suffering of the righteous and the existence of evil -- writing for his time but out of a profound spiritual faith and spiritual underpinning.

Immersed in political conflict in the midst of decay, this man nevertheless was a man of prayer--a man who knew both the duties of adoration and awe in preparation for that third duty of service. He once wrote: "Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you" and "God is always trying to give good things to us, but our hands are too full to receive them." A man of an inner spiritual life and outward action, Augustine died in August of 430 as the Vandals were besieging his own earthly city of Hippo. We remember Augustine on August 28th as a saint of the church.

Today we begin a period of worship in which we will be reading Sunday by Sunday from the Letter of James. Our reading this morning contains the famous verse:

27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

But this morning we also heard-- 17 Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

James also links the idea of doing with the idea of receiving spiritual insight and spiritual strength. If we are generous, we are to realize that our generosity is in itself a gift coming from what he calls "the Father of lights." And later he admonishes us: Be doers of the Word and not hearers only. He writes: *...those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act --they will be blessed in their doing.*

"Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you" This is a part of our Episcopal ethos--a desire to adore, to pray, to come into the presence of the Holy One with a sense of awe--and then a desire to serve, to love, to be compassionate.

Unless the whole of your ... life is a movement of praise and adoration, unless it is instinct with awe, the work which the life produces won't be much good.

Jesus is our Word. Let us come before him with adoration and with awe; with praise and thanksgiving. Let us serve him with humility and devotion.

In the name of God--Father , Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.