

The Windows of St. Peters

It is written in the Epistle to the Hebrews (chapter 12, verses 1 and 2), that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses and that we, like them, should "run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith". This "cloud of witnesses" are the saints in heaven who surround us in Christ's Mystical Body, the Church. Here at St. Peter's Church in Phoenixville we are surrounded by the saints in another way -- that is in the windows that surround the church on both sides and in the front and back. These windows do what stained glass windows in churches were originally intended to do. They remind us of the great stars of the Christian spiritual race, the saints.

We begin at the front of the church on the left behind the choir. Our Lord's mother, St. Mary, is so important that we don't have just a window for her; we have an entire worshipping area, the Lady Chapel. In the chapel we have six windows portraying what were the two most important events in her life, the announcement to her by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-35) that she was to be the mother of Jesus, and Jesus's birth.

That God chose her to be the bearer (or Mother) of God (Prayer Book, page 864, first paragraph) more than anything else makes her the first among the saints. Though

sometimes perplexed and even dismayed by her divine son (Luke 2:41-50, Matthew 12:46-50), she stood by him as he hung on the cross and she was with the apostles and women who gathered for prayer following his ascension.



The four windows above the high altar are dedicated to the four evangelists of the New Testament, Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the four apostles or apostolic associates who have left us written records of Jesus's life and teaching. Going from left to right, the first is St. Matthew. St. Matthew was a tax collector. Tax collectors were particularly hated in Jesus's time both because they were agents of the Roman occupying power, hence traitors, and because they were free to resort to extortion to add to their own wealth which they customarily did. That Jesus called Matthew to be an apostle teaches us that the Church is for all people, both for those we like and for those we do not like. The gospel attributed to St. Matthew is the longest of the gospels. It was written for Jesus's own people, the Jews. It includes one of the two stories we have of Jesus's birth (chapter 1 beginning at verse 18) and in chapters 5, 6 and 7 the great Sermon on the Mount beginning with the Beatitudes (chapter 5, verses 1-12).

Saint Mark was a young adult who became a follower of Jesus. He could be the patron saint of all church volunteer workers and secretaries. He was a supporter or helper of the apostles, not a leader: but leaders are only as good as their supporters and helpers. He helped both St. Paul and St. Barnabas in their early missionary journeys and later apparently became a sort of secretary to St. Peter in Rome. It is generally believed that St. Mark's gospel is his record of St. Peter's teaching in Rome written following St. Peter's martyrdom in 64 A.D. It was probably the first of the gospels to be written to preserve a record of St. Peter's oral preaching of Jesus's life and teaching.

The final two windows above the high altar give us a marked contrast in personal responses to Jesus's teaching and life. St. Luke was a doctor who was converted to Christianity by St. Paul and then joined him in



his missionary travels including his final voyage to Rome while under arrest. Following St. Paul's martyrdom in Rome with St. Peter in 64 A.D., he returned to the Holy Land to research Jesus's life. The results of this research account for the gospel that bears his name. As a doctor, St. Luke was very much interested in the body. His gospel stresses Jesus's healing works and it gives us the fullest account of his birth, the popular Christmas story in chapter 2. His gospel was written in Greek, which later became the language of the early Church.

Saint John, on the other hand, was preoccupied with the soul or spirit. He says nothing about Jesus's birth; Jesus was from the beginning with God (John 1:1-14). His entire gospel contains only four of Jesus's healing works; on the other hand, there are long passages on Jesus as the bread and water of life, Jesus as the light of the world and Jesus as the good shepherd. It is sometimes difficult to tell where the gospel narrative stops and St. John's own meditation on the narrative begins. The apostle John was apparently a very young man when Jesus called him, traditionally the youngest of the apostles. He was the "beloved disciple", the one who was closest to Jesus at the Last Supper. According to tradition, he was the only one of the apostles who did not suffer martyrdom. The writer of the gospel was a thinker and not a "hands-on" doer.

We go now to the east side of the church. the side facing St. Peter's Place. The first two windows portray Moses and St. John the Baptist. Moses is the only Old Testament figure in our windows. He is, strictly speaking, not one of the saints at all since this title is usually reserved only for those who came after Jesus in the Church. But he was a foreshadowing of Jesus, a God-given type or model of things to come. He led his own people, the Jews. out of their slavery in of the Red Sea, to a special relationship with God just as Jesus leads us out of the slavery of sin baptism to new life as children of God in the adopted by the Egyptian king's daughter and grew power. He renounced this luxury and power to his people. He was a great God-fearing leader. The the tablets of the Ten Commandments given him at



Moses was a great leader but he was a poor that he needed his brother Aaron to speak for him 10-17). John the Baptist, on the other hand, was a eyes he was the last of the great Jewish prophets, the Messiah who would announce the Messiah's ascetic or holy man who lived in the desert far He prepared the way for Jesus's coming by calling sin and to baptism as an outward sign of this. ministry by being baptized by John the Baptist. Herod the King to repent for an affair the king was wife, he was put in prison and later beheaded. The window shows John holding a lamb because he called Jesus the Lamb of God.

Egypt, through the waters given at Mt. Sinai in Arabia through the waters of Church. Moses had been up to a life of luxury and become the champion of window shows him holding Mt. Sinai.

speaker. The Bible tells us (Exodus, chapter 4, verses great preacher. In Christian the promised forerunner of coming. He was a very away from worldly things. people to repentance for Jesus began his own When John called on having with his brother's

The next two windows portray Saint Paul and Saint Polycarp. With Saint Paul we are still among the biblical New Testament saints who are relatively well known. With Saint Polycarp we move into the next century, the second of Christianity. Saint Paul was a zealous Jew who for awhile was a leader in the persecution of Christians. The story of his conversion to Christianity is in the New Testament book of Acts, chapter 9. According to the narrative, St. Paul's conversion as an adult was instantaneous and very dramatic. For most of us our conversion is much different; we instead grow gradually into a full Christian stature from childhood. Saint Paul went on to become the greatest missionary the Church has known. In a series of three missionary journeys described in the Book of Acts, he established a number of Christian congregations on the island of Cyprus and in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and Greece. St. Paul is shown with a sword. This is taken from his letter to the Ephesians in the New Testament (chapter 6, verse 17) where the Word of God is likened to a sword of the Spirit.



With St. Polycarp we leave the New Testament period of the Church and enter the age of persecutions. It lasted about 250 years until the Edict of Toleration issued by the emperor Constantine in 313 A. D. St. Polycarp is only one of thousands of Christians who were martyred during this period but a notable one. He was a very old man, 86 years old to be exact, when he was martyred. He was bishop of Smyrna, a town on the western coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), and was said to have been a pupil of John, "the disciple of the Lord", and appointed bishop by the apostles. When the Roman proconsul called upon him to curse Christ, Polycarp answered, "Eighty-six years I have served him and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" Instead of being thrown to the wild animals in the amphitheater, he was burned alive at the stake.

Moving down the aisle of the east side of the church, the next two windows portray the Venerable Bede and Saint Boniface. Here again we have a fascinating contrast in Christian character. Bede spent his entire life in a monastery from the age of seven. He was a scholar, teacher and writer during the early medieval period known as the Dark Ages when battle, murder and sudden death were life's norms. He was one of those band of Christian monks who preserved learning and culture in the Church's monasteries at a time when it seemed that all of civilization would be destroyed by the violence of the barbarian migrations in Europe. He was a scholar far ahead of his time. His learning embraced all knowledge, both religious and secular. And his writings were not just pious legends but they were carefully researched documents still used today. His most famous work, *The Ecclesiastical History of England*, written in Latin, is still a primary source for history of the period.



Saint Boniface was another English monk of the Dark Ages. But here any similarity with The Venerable Bede stops. Boniface was not a scholar; he was a missionary, an outdoorsman, an organizer and a man of action which missionaries must be. He went first to Holland but his efforts there were not successful. Later, with backing from the Church in Rome, he went to Germany where he spent the rest of his life planting and reforming churches, monasteries and dioceses in southern, western and central Germany. He became Archbishop of the city of Mainz. It was he who anointed Pepin, the father of

Charlemagne, as king of the Franks and thus began the bringing of peace and stability to Central Europe and an end to the Dark Ages. In 733 A. D. he resigned as Archbishop of Mainz and returned to Holland where he was murdered by pagans while awaiting a service of confirmation.

The final two windows along the east aisle of the church, largely hidden by the narthex screen, are dedicated to two of the greatest saints of that period of Church history known as the High Middle Ages -- Saints Anselm and Francis. Saint Anselm lived in the 11th century and Saint Francis in the 13th century. Both were born in Italy but Anselm was a Norman and, therefore, more French than Italian. He was a monk, a scholar, a philosopher, a theologian and, first as head of one of the largest monasteries in Europe. and later as Archbishop of Canterbury in England, an administrator and pastor. As philosopher and theologian St. Anselm gave us the ontological proof for the existence of God (a philosopher's argument) and a reasoned explanation of the Christian doctrine of the Atonement (at-one-ment, how we are reconciled to God through Jesus's crucifixion) This is contained in his book *Cur Deus Homo* (Latin for "Why God became Man") which he is shown holding in the window. He was a virtual martyr in his long and steadfast defense of the Church from the repeated attempts of the successor of William the Conqueror to confiscate the Church's land and money in England.

Saint Francis of Assisi is probably the greatest and most popular of all of the Church's saints, the one who perhaps more than even the saints of the New Testament lived a life most closely patterned after Jesus's example. As the son of a wealthy Italian businessman, he lived the good life of that time in his early youth. But as he grew older, encounters with the poor and the sick inspired him, in opposition to his family, to a total renunciation of all worldly things. He founded an order of friars, the Franciscans, who at first did not live in monasteries but traveled from village to village preaching and ministering to the poor and the sick. Francis and the early Franciscans were mendicants-literally, beggars. They renounced all wealth of any kind and lived from the offerings of those among whom they ministered.

Shortly before his death in 1226 A. D., during a retreat, St. Francis received the stigmata the marks of the nails in Jesus's hands and feet on his own hands and feet. At a time when the Church was too wealthy for its own good, he lived and taught holy poverty.

Continuing around the church we cross now to the west aisle and come to two windows again largely hidden by the narthex screen. These two windows are dedicated to Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer and Lancelot Andrews, a saintly English bishop of the 16th century. Thomas Cranmer was Archbishop of Canterbury during part of the reign of King Henry VIII and the entire reign of King Edward VI in England, a time when England was going through its own religious reformation separate from the Reformation on the continent of Europe. He was a scholar better suited to the university than to court politics, but he did support Henry in Henry's determination to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and as a result was made Archbishop of Canterbury at the king's instigation. Following Henry's death, during the reign of the sickly boy king, Edward VI, he had a free hand in pursuing his own ideas about Church reformation and the result was the first *Book of Common Prayer*. Every *Book of Common Prayer* in every branch of the Anglican Communion including our own is a direct descendent of Thomas Cranmer's reforming work.

Lancelot Andrews was a holy and devout bishop at a time when bishops were not usually holy and devout, the early 16th century. His book *Preces Privatae* (Private Devotions) shown in the window, stands as a devotional classic of all time, a manual of prayers he compiled for his own use. He was bishop during the reign of King James I of England, a time when the Church of England (and our own Anglican Christian heritage) was under attack from both right and left, from the Roman Catholic Church as being just another

Protestant sect, and from Protestants as being just an imitation of the (Roman) Catholic Church. Lancelot Andrews defended the true catholicity of Anglican Christianity. He also was a noted preacher and accomplished Biblical scholar. He was one of the translators of the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible.

Our tour of the saints of St. Peter's Church has given us thus far a short outline history of the Christian Church. We have St. Paul from the New Testament period, St. Polycarp during the time of persecutions, the scholar The Venerable Bede and the missionary St. Boniface during the Dark Ages. the archbishop St. Anselm and the friar St. Francis, during what is sometimes called the "golden age of the Church in the High Middle Ages, and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and Bishop Lancelot Andrews in the Reformation and post-Reformation period in England, the period from which we draw our own American Episcopal heritage. We come now to the colonial period in the history of the United States.

As we move up the west aisle of the church from the back towards the front, the third window we come to is dedicated to Bishop William White. He was rector of Christ Church. Second Street above Market in Philadelphia, before and during the Revolution; chaplain of the Continental Congress; and, after the Revolution, chaplain of the new United States Senate and the first Bishop of Pennsylvania. Bishop White was a moderate who remained at his parish in Philadelphia during the British occupation and who presided at the organizing convention of independent branch of the the new Episcopal Church in 1789, the first England before the England, after the Philadelphia should omit Second and Market Anglican Communion. He was ordained a priest in Revolution and consecrated Bishop, again in Revolution. No tours of the historical area in seeing Bishop White's church, Old Christ Church at Streets.



Philadelphia during the organizing convention of independent branch of the England before the England, after the Philadelphia should omit Second and Market

The window next to the one dedicated to Bishop Wesley, contemporary of Bishop White and the John Wesley was akin in many ways to St. Francis Christ and for souls. While St. Francis's genius was and the sick, John Wesley's genius was in among the poor. He was for awhile a missionary in before the Revolution but his work there did not England where in May of 1738 he underwent an at a religious meeting in London. As a result of this, he felt truly converted. He developed a very informal style of evangelism which the Church of England of that period could not accept. He was forced to hold his evangelistic meetings in the open and in halls and they soon became very popular especially among the poor. John Wesley lived and died a priest of the Church of England. But his movement was shunned by the Church, and ultimately became independent.

White is dedicated to John founder of Methodism. of Assisi in his zeal for in ministering to the poor evangelism particularly the Colony of Georgia prosper and he returned to intense spiritual experience



Moving up the west aisle of the church towards the front again the next two windows portray a John Howard and a William Carey. Both were Englishmen of the 18th century and both were Baptists. That they were Englishmen is perhaps understandable in an Anglican Church: that they were both Baptists is simply

unheard of That they were both men of extraordinary Christian character is beyond question. John Howard has been called the father of English prison reform; he died ministering to victims of the plague. William Carey was a shoemaker and a Baptist preacher who went to India as an early missionary there and by his letters stimulated a powerful awakening of missionary zeal in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These windows perhaps reflect the interest in Christian unity that was beginning to take hold at the time our present church was built. The Episcopal Church standing as it does between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism has always been a leader in Christian unity. It is therefore appropriate that these windows have found a place here at St. Peter's.

We have reached a point where those remembered in the windows of our church are almost contemporary with us. Phillips Brooks and Charles Henry Brent to whom the last two windows in our circuit of the church are dedicated (the first two windows on the west aisle of the church) died in 1893 and 1929 respectively, not a hundred years ago, while the Christian Church began almost two thousand years ago. Nor are these two men saints in the same sense as those in the windows on the east side of the church. Both men are principally known here in the United States and both men have lived only recently. Thus they lack the broad recognition of time and space that have made a saint a saint in the past. But we are all called to be saints. And both Phillips Brooks and Charles Henry Brent responded to this call nobly. They both lived outstanding Christian lives that deserved to be remembered.

Phillips Brooks was a great preacher, one of the greatest our country has produced. He began his ministry in Philadelphia but later became rector of Trinity Church in Boston and later still Bishop of Massachusetts. He wrote the poem "O Little Town of Bethlehem" which was later set to music. His sermons were not bombastic which is sometimes confused with great preaching. Rather it was said that they were "quiet and seldom impassioned". It was said that they were great also because of "his singularly pure and lofty spirit".



Charles Henry Brent was born and educated in Canada. He was elected by our own Episcopal Church in 1901 as Missionary Bishop to the Philippines where he fought the opium traffic and later represented the United States on the League of Nations Narcotics Committee. He was Senior Chaplain of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I. But his greatest work was his organizing and leadership at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910 and at the World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1927 which meetings began the modern Ecumenical Movement for Christian unity in our own era.

We have one saint to go, the most important one of all to us. If we make a circuit of the church as described in this paper and return to the center of the choir and turn and look towards the back of the church and up we will see one of the finest stained glass windows the writer has ever seen in a parish church. Actually it is five windows in one dedicated to the patron saint of our parish, St Peter. It depicts various events in St. Peter's ministry although sometimes the pictorial allusions are difficult to make out. It is the most beautiful window in our church and probably the least noticed, since it is in the back wall and behind the narthex screen.



St. Peter was probably the oldest of the apostles since he is portrayed in the gospels and in the Book of Acts as their spokesman and leader and thus by Jewish custom the oldest. He was a small businessman, a fisherman, introduced to Jesus by his brother, Saint Andrew (John 1:35-42). Midway in the Gospels Jesus asks the apostles who they think he is. Peter speaks for the rest of the Twelve and says, "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God" (Matthew 16: 13-20). Jesus said to Peter, "You are Peter, the Rock; and on this rock I will build my church" [NEB Matthew 16:18]. As with other portions of the Bible, this has been interpreted in various ways. Non-Roman Catholics take it to mean that the rock on which the Church is founded is the faith that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Roman Catholics take it to mean that Peter is the rock on which the church is founded and the popes are his successors.

Peter was one of the three apostles with Jesus at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8). He insisted that he would never deny Jesus and then denied him three times (Matthew 26:31-35,69-75). Peter, like the other apostles, fell asleep during Jesus's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane despite Jesus's pleas, but then, at the moment of Jesus's arrest, according to the Gospel of John, he drew a sword and cut off an ear of the servant of the high priest (John 18:10-11). It was to Peter that Jesus gave a threefold charge of pastoral care after the Resurrection (John 21:15-19) thus reinstating his apostolate after his threefold denial. But it is in the book of the Acts of the Apostles where St. Peter really comes into his own. Although the book deals primarily with St. Paul and his missionary journeys, almost the first half of the book of Acts has to do with St. Peter's leadership and preaching and evangelism in the early Church. It was St. Peter first who recognized that the Gospel message of the risen Lord was for the gentiles as well as the Jews (Acts chapters 10 and 11:1 - 18). According to tradition, St. Peter was crucified head down at his execution by his own request because he denied Jesus.

NOTE

Much, if not most, of the factual material contained in this essay has been taken from the volume "*The Propers for the LESSER FEASTS AND FASTS*" together with "*The Fixed Holy Days*" published by The Church Hymnal Corporation, 800 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017-4754. This book, cloth bound, 436 pages, may be obtained from the publisher for the price of \$13.95.

The background material comes from the writer's own interest in and study of Church history over a period of many years.

May27, 1992

The writer wishes to express his very profound thanks to Mrs. Ruth Silver of St. Peter's Church for typing and correcting many times over the manuscript for this paper.

Edward H. Mansley