

St Stephen's News

St Stephen's Anglican Church · Timonium, Maryland

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FROM THE RECTOR

It is time to speak out in face of persecution

Most people probably can't imagine they have much in common with a Roman soldier from the Province of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) who was judicially murdered towards the end of the third century AD. But there are in fact striking similarities between today's America and the Roman Empire at the time of St. George.

Like theirs, ours is an intensely materialistic society. We cleave to the conviction that our innate ingenuity, fostered by our free enterprise system, is equal to just about any challenge that will ever be presented to us. The Romans shared a similar conviction; a conviction, moreover reinforced by an 800-year record of intellectual achievement and technical innovation.

America is by far the world's pre-eminent military and economic power. Much as our rivals may envy us, none of them can equal either our industrial might or our ability to wage war. Rome was in an even stronger position than we are. It had utterly destroyed its only serious military rival – the Carthaginian Empire – some 500 years before and, thus, was, effectively, able to dictate the terms of trade to most of the known world.

The Roman head of state, the emperor, was not an elected official as is ours, but, even so, the organization charts of the U.S. government, and the Roman imperial government virtually mirror one another. America has the FBI, so did Rome. Like America, Rome had city and state police, fire departments, sanitation and public health departments, welfare offices, law courts, running water and public sewers.

Even the economies were similar. Like us, Rome had banks, insurance brokerages, joint stock companies, stock exchanges, publishing houses, freight lines and agro-businesses. Their tax collection system was even more efficient than the IRS, and its politicians and civil servants wrestled with precisely the same problems as ours – trade, tariffs, sagging productivity, the national debt and inflation. Often they came up with the same answers. At the time as St. George was martyred the Emperor Diocletian's treasury secretary had just imposed price and income controls.

There is, however, a very big difference between the United States and Rome – namely Rome had no equivalent of our Constitution and Bill of Rights. All Roman citizens were equal before the law. All Roman citizens had the right to trial by the Emperor. But Rome recognized no such thing as human rights. All interests were subordinate to those of the state and the state brooked no rival, not even God.

This explains why Roman officials – from the emperor down to local magistrates – found Christianity such an irritant. Jesus teaches that man's duty to God takes precedence over his duty to everything else. Roman church/state relations were, thus, invariably uneasy, and frequently marked by periods of brutal persecution.

Curiously enough, a main center of Christianity in the Roman world was the army. There were few legions in which Christians were not at least a sizable minority and a number of legions were Christian to a man. St. George, who was born the province of Cappadocia, a major Christian center, served as an officer in the Roman army in Palestine.

The Holy Land was as big a trouble spot back then as it is today, and George's courage and ability brought him to the Emperor Diocletian's attention. And under Diocletian's direct patronage, he rose to the rank of military tribune, the equivalent of a colonel.

Diocletian's efforts to curb the rampant inflation afflicting the empire by means of price and income controls was not only ineffective, but destructive economically and, thus, highly unpopular.

The policy impoverished entire industrial sectors. Farmers, large and small, went bankrupt. Bakers joined the breadline. Factories laid-off workers. And riots broke out all over the empire.

This, then, is the background to Diocletian's great persecution – an event calculated not only to distract the population from their economic woes, but to provide the emperor with an opportunity to test the loyalty of his legions. News of persecution reached one legion as it marched over the Alps en route to put down an insurrection in Gaul. The legion

was paraded and all Christians were ordered to advance one pace. The entire legion stepped a pace forward.

Executioners were ordered to decimate the ranks. One man in every ten was executed, and all remaining Christians were ordered to advance a pace. Again, the entire legion stepped forward. Again, orders were given to kill every tenth man. When only 40 remained, the exhausted executioners forced them out onto an ice-covered lake where they froze to death.

When the persecution reached Palestine, George immediately resigned his commission and went to Rome to protest the persecution and the atrocities to the Emperor Diocletian in person. He was immediately arrested and imprisoned. When a prolonged period of torture failed to persuade him to recant, he was summarily put to death.

George didn't achieve sainthood by means of his military prowess. The dragon he fought was the dragon of tyranny and injustice. He fought not with sword but through the legal system. In this, he is a very modern martyr akin to Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer who for years bravely denounced Nazism.

The Christian faith is no more popular with the power brokers who believe every citizen's interests are subordinate to those of

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR SCHEDULE,

Dec. 24th, 2016 to Jan. 1st, 2017

CHRISTMAS EVE Saturday, December 24th

4.00 PM: Children's Christmas Service &

Blessing of the Creche

7.00 PM: Family Candlelight Eucharist

10.30 PM: Choir sings carols followed by

Solemn High Christmas Eucharist

CHRISTMAS DAY Sunday, December 25th

10.00 AM Sung Holy Communion

NEW YEAR'S EVE The Feast of St. Sylvester

Saturday, December 31st, 2013 11.15

PATRONAL FESTIVAL

The Feast of St. Stephen Comm. Sunday, January 1st

8.00 AM: Holy Communion

9.15 AM: Choral Eucharist

11.15 AM: Choral Mattins

the state. Thus persecution is still a fact of life for professing Christians today. Here in America it is a soft form of persecution. It is persecution by ridicule, exclusion and political and judicial suppression rather than arrest, torture and execution. However in other parts of the world – notably Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and China – thousands upon thousands of Christians are being imprisoned, tortured and slaughtered for their faith. And many Islamic countries that do not overtly persecute Christians forbid full expression of the faith.

Shamefully, the U.S. Administration and many mainline churches are silent in face of the suffering. But this is not an option for those of us who profess to practice the faith, Like George and Bonhoeffer, we must speak out fearlessly against it. Bonhoeffer summed up the consequences of failing to do so: "When they came for the Communists, I said nothing for I was not a Communist. When they came for the socialists, I said nothing for I was not a socialist. When they came for the conservatives I said nothing for I was not a conservative. And when they came for me nobody said anything – for there was nobody left to speak." GPH✠

Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List as well as the guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or to the visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, ring the parish office on 410 560 677

FOR RECOVERY: Hilarie, Edie, Bill, Alan, Terry, Helen, Jim, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Tom, Robert, David, Jan, Susie, Sophia, Bobby, Lee, Pam, Cary, Courtney, Marie, Joanna, Finnie, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John, David, Jorge, Adrian, Llywd & Michell

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Stephen, Melba, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Ned, Cindy, Jacob, Casey & Bet

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; Lt Cdr Emma Hawkins, RN; MSGT Michael Holter, USAF; Cpt Fiodor Strikovski, US Army

St Stephen's Anglican Church

11856 Mays Chapel Road, Timonium, MD 21093

Office: 410 560 6776 · Rectory: 410 665 1278

Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

The Rev. Canon Guy P Hawtin, *Rector*

The Venerable Michael Kerouac, *Vicar*

The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. John Novicki and

The Rev. Robert Ludwig, *Associate Rectors*

The Rev. M Wiley Hawks, *Pastoral Care Chaplain*

Mrs Happy Riley, *Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding Coordinator*

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist

9.15am: Choral Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)

11am: Choral Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)

6pm: Choral Evensong (as announced) –

evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30pm: Bridge Club

Tuesday, 7am: Fellowship Breakfast (Nautilus Diner)

Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle

Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

Cookie Walk 2016

Saturday, December 3rd, 9.00 am - 1.00 pm

Evensong

Sunday, December 4th, 6.00 pm

Parish Life

Tuesday December 13th, 7.00 pm

Ladies Who Lunch

(Bluestone Restaurant)

Wednesday December 21st 12.00 pm - 2.00 pm

Christmas Memorial Flowers

To make a contribution towards the Church Christmas decorations in honor or memory of a loved one please complete this form and return it with a check (payable to St. Stephen's Church and marked for Christmas flowers) by Thursday December 22nd.

Name of Donor: _____

Poinsettias (Red, White or Pink) 6 inches, single (3-5 blooms @ \$10 (# of plants.....))

6 inches, single, (6-8 blooms) @ \$16 (# of plants.....)

7 inches, double, (9-12 blooms) @ \$20 (# of plants.....)

Total # of plants _____ Total amount enclosed _____

My gift is IN HONOR, IN MEMORY OF, IN THANKSGIVING FOR (please circle)

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