



# ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

3rd Sunday After Easter/ St. George (transferred)  
April 30, 2017

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.**

The passage selected for the Sermon this morning is taken from the Epistle:

"I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak of you as evildoers; they may, by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of the visitation. Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake...for so is the will of God, that with well doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." 1<sup>st</sup> St. Peter 2:11-15

On this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Easter, the message is we should sacrifice in this world to the glory of God for the sake of those people that persecute us. The message isn't about delayed gratification, it is about meaningful sacrifice. Jesus compares our sorrows in these sacrifices to the labor of childbirth. St. Peter, like Jesus, gave himself willingly to the persecutors and was killed for glory of the Gospel. So did another Saint, whose feast day we celebrate tomorrow.

St. George, the patron saint of England, never stepped foot on the island. He was born of Greek parents, and his father was so influential that the Roman Emperor Diocletian sought his friendship and his influence. George was a Tribunus, the equivalent of a full colonel, in the Roman Army. Though he owed his position to the influence of his powerful father, he was known as a courageous and competent leader in his own right. He was also a Christian, a dangerous identity for

even a man of influence under the reign of Diocletian.

Diocletian's wife was a Christian as well. The influence of her faith led to her resistance to his selfish, privileged and bloodthirsty desires. Their marital discord, urged on by his most important military general, Galerius, who supported the old Roman religious traditions, sparked one of the greatest persecutions the Church has known. In one manifestation of the persecutions, Diocletian made a proclamation that every soldier would sacrifice to old Roman idols, or would be killed, and that every other Christian that his army encountered would be put to death.

Certainly Diocletian knew that George was a Christian, but expected that George would disavow his faith for his career and his safety. When George proclaimed his faith, openly and publicly, Diocletian had a dilemma. He did not want to lose a valued officer, and the son of his most important political ally, so Diocletian opened the full bag of Satan's tricks to resolve his dilemma. He threatened St. George. He appealed to his ambition. He accused him of betraying his family. He tried to buy him off, with money, prostitutes and privileges. When all that failed, he resorted to torture. When the common tortures failed, he put St. George on a rack of swords, reviving him 3 separate times when the pain made him unconscious. When even that failed, the emperor had him beheaded, making him one of the most glorious and inspirational martyrs of his age.

His association with England began with Richard the Lionhearted during the Third Crusade. In St. George, Richard found a perfect patron, the Christian soldier, persistent in faith, triumphant over the forces of Satan, which were represented by the dragon in George's legend, and by the oppression of the Holy land and aggression against Constantinople by Islam during Richard's campaigns. He adopted St. George's banner, the Red Cross of martyrdom on the white background of purity, to be his banner in battle and eventually the flag of England.

The account of St. George and the dragon has roots as far back as the 7<sup>th</sup> Century. In the legend, a lake in Silene, now Libya, is beset by a plague bearing dragon. The locals, first as practicality and eventually as idol worship, feed the dragon sheep to keep him away. As they run out of sheep, they hold a lottery to select a virgin to offer in the sheep's place. The king's daughter is chosen, and despite his pleading and offering a ransom in exchange for her release, she is left in bridal gown to the whims of the dragon. St. George happens along, sees the predicament, and determines to rescue the maiden. He wounds the dragon with his lance, and then brings the wounded beast into the town, where he commits to slay the beast in exchange for the town's conversion to Christianity. A Roman history of the saints published in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century tried to bring a sense of historical rather than mythical grounding by identifying the dragon as a crocodile. But that effort was futile, and eventually St. George evolved into the form of chivalric knighthood represented in the famous painting by Raphael, as his legend became part of the English Romance tradition.

The truth on which the lesson is based is even more wonderful, and more emblematic of Christian sacrifice than the legend could ever be. In the legend, St. George overcomes the dragon with

military skill. In truth, St. George overcomes the demonically inspired Diocletian by professing his faith and maintaining it through temptations and torture, even unto his death. The maiden he saves isn't a random princess, or even Diocletian's Christian wife, it is the Bride of Christ, the Church. In St. George's protection are the Christian soldiers and their families, and the Christians in the land they occupy. They are His flock, and his victory over Satan isn't won by dexterity with horse and lance and sword. It is won by his sacrifice. In the face of persecution, St. George's faith and courage become an inspiration to the Church, and as she always does in times of persecution, the Church grew stronger, in the faith of individuals, and in numbers converted through his inspiration.

How appropriate that this congregation, made of Englishmen, and those who love things English, who aspire to the practice of Christian values in the form of Anglican worship, take this day to honor St. George. How much more appropriate it would be if we adopted his courage and perseverance in our trials and tribulations. We live in contentious times and are awash in discourtesy and angry conversation, yet we do not yet approach the culture of Diocletian.

If St. George could bear his persecutions with dignity and courage and love, we should also be able to bear up under the ugliness of our time, and set an example of Christian forbearance and kindness. We have the opportunity, in our culture, in our workplace, in our families, even in our church family, to take the indignities we suffer, and make the Christian sacrifice in the tradition of St. George.

***In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.***