



St. Paul's Church

422 Market St.

Box 1551, Camden, New Jersey 08101

Joys and Boundaries

Last week, I went Jorge Martinez's ordination to the priesthood. As many of you know, Jorge has had a long history with St. Paul's parish, from the time he was a very involved lay person to his enrollment in the Deacon's School in the diocese. Following his graduation, he was tapped by Bishop Stokes to help Father Pedro Guzman at San Andreas in Camden, but he still needed to have a connection with his old parish. When I arrived in early June, 2019, Jorge had said that he wanted to lead the afternoon evensong once a week, which was a tremendous help to me and a boon to our evening guests who clearly loved his presence. The bishop, who has absolute authority in placement of deacons, eventually sent him to San Juan's in Elizabeth, another Spanish-speaking congregation who would have loved his gentle, caring manner. It was in Elizabeth that I saw him ordained, the congregation all spaced by six feet inside St. John's beautiful old sanctuary, the altar party less successfully so, if only because it was the meeting of joy and sacrament that makes the "abundance of caution" by which we now live appear as so much a contradiction in terms.

By now, we are so used to much of our lives being governed by a preoccupation with safety that the unfettered abandon of love seems like something the rarest of things. That same trip, I stopped to see my mother in Monmouth County, where we sat outside at a distance of well-over fifteen feet, my sister and I fully masked (she is very adamant about observing safety protocols, especially around someone who is about to turn eighty-nine). All of this is good and well and appropriate. Loving people at a distance is hard. But insofar as this is a "marathon," as I am continually reminded, I believe it should not allow us to somehow diminish the joy with which we conduct ourselves within and outside the church. I am as cognizant as anyone of the inherent limits to how we can "do" church within the boundaries set for us. Last Sunday, Kelly was ill and could not operate the Zoom/Facebook feed. The peace at both liturgies was the least "Pauline" I have experienced, people turning in their well-spaced pews and politely waving at one another. But we were *in the church* for the first time in six months, hearing the same gospel, sharing the same sacrament as we

always have. There are many things I wish could have been different. Someone, however, told me she was holding in her tears when she was back in the building because it finally felt like church again. That comment alone made the day worthwhile.

I did not come to St. Paul's for the building. I came for the love that people show one another, for the integrity with which we pursue our ministries, for the light we represent in our community. We love to say that the church is its people, not its building, which is true, as far as it goes. But this has been the place in which the people of St. Paul's have gathered for years. It is the place where we have learned to love each other and however rocky the road, it is the place we have learned to "be" church. Like our very abrupt transition out of the sanctuary, the re-adjustment may take some time. But there is now a congregation celebrating at St. Paul's Church, witnessing together to the gospel, our losses and joys. Thanks be to God

Day By Day

Love must be tried and tested and proved. It must be tried as though by fire. And fire burns.

We may be living in a desert when it comes to such perceptions now, and that desert may stretch before us for years. But a thousand days are as one day in the sight of God, and soon we will know as we are known.

Dorothy Day (1948)

Many of you know how fond I am of Dorothy Day, even if our politics do not completely align, because she was always concerned with the long view. It is why I believe her words are so prescient today. If you are like me, we tend to think in the smallest possible increments; we believe we hardly have enough information, that our lives are in a kind of suspended animation. But from the standpoint of the divine, about which we can only speculate, Day's observation is a bracing dose of humility.

My only argument with her observation is that we are also tried by love. The love that created all things, the love that keeps and sustains us, is having us witness to a time when our



sisters and brothers in the west are watching their states burn, where people are suffering from loss of life and property. The pandemic continues to play havoc with our lives and those of our neighbors around the globe. Dialogue about race and equity is a practical impossibility in the current political climate.

Again, speaking only for myself, the temptation is to ask how long our current state can go on. But the desert time we are still occupying, even as we begin through a new "program" year,

gives us an opportunity to take the perspective that God is accomplishing things with us and our love for one another that we would not be able to learn otherwise. I am not saying anything so crude as that God wishes suffering on any of us. God knows there has been enough of that already. But I believe we are learning to love one another differently and, if anything redeems this time, it may be that fact alone.

With Day, I believe that we are learning that love is not some cheap Hallmark sentiment but is something that is being tried in all of us. And it does burn, in our prayers for those who suffer for the ordeals of the medical personnel, for the families who mourn. However long our current situation lasts, months or even years, I believe we are learning to love differently, as people and as a church. And for that fact alone, I am grateful.



*Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another
with whatever gift each of you has received. - 1 PETER 4:10*

September 2020

Dear St. Paul's Family,

When Kelly and I moved to Camden in May 2019, we were excited to join a congregation that had honed a reputation for generosity, determination to meet the needs of the marginalized and a gift for welcoming the outsider. I had heard of all these qualities when I served in the Diocese of Pennsylvania; in our case, it was the last of these features that was most attractive to us. We felt like family ever since we arrived and have been exceedingly grateful for your warmth and determination to see St. Paul's as a major presence in a resurgent Camden.

While we have all felt the weight of the challenges of the last several months, my admiration for the parish continues unabated. St. Paul's has shown a resilience in the face of the unanticipated challenge of the pandemic that has been truly remarkable. Our movement to Zoom worship and the continuation of the food ministries have shown a hope for the future that would be the envy of many parishes. Such faith bodes well for the future, with a return to in-person worship and all the changes we are likely to experience in the coming year.

In my view, the faith you have shown is a quality that will serve us well in the future. Along with the ministries of the church come inevitable expenses that all parishes must address. But our gift to the church has to do with our souls more than our pocketbooks; it is a "yes" that we say to the future of this remarkable parish that gives hope to the future of our part of Camden. Yes, we have payroll, insurance and utilities to address, but it is the faith deep in our souls that we are demonstrating in our pledges for the coming year.

I hope you will join me in engaging in that journey of faith this year. The vestry have all offered a pledge for 2021. The unprecedented generosity you showed last year offered us all tremendous insight into the faith we have in ourselves and in the future. I hope that you will pray over the commitment you can offer and return a pledge card by the beginning of November. We will be continuing the faith our predecessors showed at the founding of St. Paul's 190 years ago and continues as a beacon to all those who cross our threshold in the coming year.

God bless you all,

Father Mark

[St. Paul's Episcopal Church](#)

www.stpaulschurchcamden.net

New Schedule of Services

Our new schedule of services is as follows:

Sunday:

Holy Eucharist
9:30am

Sung Mass (with
Zoom participation
and streamed to
Facebook):

11 am

We plan to add
evensong within the
month as approved
by the diocese.

Daily Offices

Morning prayer:

Monday -Friday
7:30

Evening Prayer:

Tuesday and
Thursday
5:30pm