



The S. Stephen

The monthly news at S. Stephen's Church in Providence
April/May, 2007

Vol. 6, No. 8

Parish Retreat

Retreatants from S. Stephen's will attend a Parish Retreat the weekend of May 4-6 at the Community of Saint Mary in Greenwich, New York.

If you would like to attend, please pick up a registration form in the Narthex. The deadline to register has passed, but if you are interested please contact Deborah Lawrence or Cathy Bledsoe.

Former Presiding Bishop To Preach at S. Stephen's

Please join us on Sunday, April 22nd, for the visit of the Most Rev'd Frank T. Griswold III, who will celebrate, preach, and confirm at the 10:00 am Mass.

S. Stephen's Church Annual Mass Guild of All Souls

The Rev. Canon Barry Swain of the Church of the Resurrection in New York City will preach at the Annual Mass of the American Branch of the Guild of All Souls on Saturday, April 28 at 11:00 a.m.

S. Stephen's is honored to host the Guild of All Souls Annual Meeting which will be held on Friday night.

The entire parish is invited to attend the Resurrection Mass on Saturday morning and a luncheon served by The Society of Mary.

If you would like to participate in luncheon preparations (and help is needed), please sign up to bring a salad, sandwiches, or bar cookies. You'll find the sign-up sheets in the Narthex and at Coffee Hour.

Early Mass on May 27th

Brown Commencement

There will be only one Mass, the Solemn High Mass at 8:00 the morning of May 27th, Brown University Commencement Day.



Christ and the Woman of Samaria
16th Century by Agostino Carracci

May 13th

Rogation Sunday

Once the church had a festival called "Rogation Sunday," a day when the vested priest with the villagers in tandem walked the boundaries of the parish. Later this procession became known as the parish perambulation, or "beating the bounds." In the 19th century, even in many large towns, the vicar, the mayor, the people—and crowds of children—would tramp around the exact boundary line of their village or town. If there was a hedge in the way of the line, they demolished it. If a house was built across the boundary line, a window was broken and the mayor's mace passed through. If the boundary ran along the middle of a river, then the vicar and mayor would hop in a boat and row down the line. What was going on?

The whole idea had its roots well before Christianity. The Romans had a festival called the *robogalia* when the people walked to their fields to pray and ask the gods to protect their crops. They especially prayed to the god known as Terminus, the god of fields and boundaries.

When Christianity became the principle religion of Europe the festival continued, with Jesus as the focus of prayers. A cross was carried around the boundary line, at various points, the Bible

was read or prayers said. Sometimes the place where this was done was called Gospel Oak, Amen Corner, or the like. The purpose, though, was the same as in Roman times—to ask God's blessing on the crops and to check that no-one had trespassed in any way across the border of each parish. In some places, mainly in country parishes in England and Europe, this custom is still practiced.

We keep the day by having the Litany in Procession at the beginning of Mass, with special Rogation Sunday petitions added in. The Great Litany is not primarily penitential, but it is intercessory as well.

We do enjoy walking the boundaries of the land we possess and it is good to give thanks for the richness of the earth, but boundaries can have their downside. In Jesus' times there were rigid boundaries between Jews and Samaritans (Jews who thought that sacrifices could be made to God in places other than the temple at Jerusalem); even when they were neighbors they would have nothing to do with one another. But as the Gospel of John shows us, this kind of exclusion was not what Jesus had in mind. During his thirsty travels through Samaria, Jesus comes upon a well where he asks a woman for a drink of water.

"How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"
"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

By the end of the story the woman knows she is talking to the Messiah and her life is changed. A boundary has been broken and Jesus is no longer thirsty for her soul.

The story asks us to think about the boundaries we build between people. Inside our boundaries we feel safe and have plenty to help us lead our happy lives, but what about the people who are shut out and living on the other side?

There are two kinds of boundaries. Those that keep us from loving our neighbor must be torn down, but those that help us live fully Christian lives as

(Continued on page five)

Father Alexander's letter to the parish

My dear people:

Easter Sunday has come and gone, but the Season of Easter—also known as Eastertide—lasts fifty days until the feast of Pentecost

(which will be celebrated this year on Sunday, May 27th, Memorial Day Weekend). Another name for the Easter Season is “the Great Fifty Days.”

(Admittedly, by some reckonings, Eastertide lasts only forty days, until the Ascension. But for our purposes, we can consider Ascensiontide, the ten days from Ascension until Pentecost, as the final phase of the Easter Season.)

During Eastertide, you may notice some liturgical variations in our celebration of Sunday Mass. We use the gold set of high Mass vestments at the High Altar. The acolytes and choir wear red cassocks. Some of the penitential components of the liturgy—including the General Confession and the Prayer of Humble Access—are omitted. Alleluias are added at the Fraction and the Dismissal. Some of the Sunday Masses will begin with the sprinkling of the congregation with Holy Water, accompanied by the chant *Vidi Aquam*. All these touches highlight the celebratory character of the season.

Looking ahead, the 2007 Easter Season now under way promises to be an eventful time in the life of the parish. As I write, we are looking forward to the nuptials of the Rt. Rev. GERALYN WOLF and Mr. Thomas Charles Bair, Jr. at the Cathedral on Saturday, April 21st, at 11:00 am with the Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold, III presiding. Then, on Sunday April 22nd, we shall welcome the former Presiding Bishop, to celebrate, preach, and confirm at S. Stephen's.

On Saturday of the following week, April 28th, we shall host the Annual Mass of the American Branch of the Guild of All Souls at 11:00 am. The Rev. Canon Barry Swain, Rector of the Church of the Resurrection in New York City, and Superior-General of the American Branch of the Guild, will preach. Founded in England in 1873, this Anglo-Catholic devotional society works to promote the practice of prayer for the faithful departed throughout the Anglican

Communion. Members of the Guild will be coming to Providence from far and wide to attend this event at S. Stephen's; and I hope that we shall be able muster a good showing of parishioners to welcome them. A luncheon prepared by The Society of Mary will follow and all are invited.

On Friday, May 4th, members of S. Stephen's will travel to Greenwich, New York, to participate in the parish retreat at the Community of Saint Mary, which will last through Sunday, May 6th. More details are available on the special information board in the church narthex. Although by now the registration deadline has technically passed, we may be able to fit in more participants. This is a wonderful opportunity to get away for a time of quiet and prayer in beautiful surroundings. For more information, please contact Deborah Lawrence or Cathy Bledsoe.

Looking further ahead, mark your calendars now for the Solemn Evensong and Benediction at 5:30 pm on May 20th, the Sunday after the Ascension. Our visiting preacher that evening will be the Rev. Patrick T. Gray, Curate at the Church of the Advent, Boston.

The month of May is also the time of year when we begin planning for the coming season—September 2007 to June 2008. During this time, we seek feedback and input from parishioners and friends on what has worked well during the current year, what could be improved, and what new ideas we might try. Obviously, we cannot promise to implement every new proposal, but the more ideas we receive, the greater the likelihood we have of a creative and fruitful planning process. The bottom line is that if you have any ideas on what we might do (or avoid doing) during the coming year, the time to let us know what you're thinking is now. Don't wait until August or September when our *Parish Programs and Events Calendar* for 2007-2008 will have been finalized and published—for then in most instances it will be too late. →

A Renaissance Woman of the Middle Ages

On Saturday, April 14, the Society of Mary's "Our Lady of Providence" ward was privileged to hear Stephen D'Evelyn, Ph.D. talk about Hildegard of Bingen—a remarkable saint whose influence in the late 20th and early 21st century is beginning to be almost as great as it was in her own time.

Born in 1098 in Germany, the youngest of ten children, Hildegard became a nun at eighteen, and an abbess before she turned 40. Stephen described her three famous visionary works, as well as the natural history and medical work she wrote, and led us through one of her short poems, “O noblest greenness,” which he had translated. Its imagery wonderfully depicts God's grace animating all things. Hildegard was also a brilliant composer whose works are finding a growing audience in recent years. As a Benedictine abbess, she set her mystical poems so that they might be sung by the nuns of her abbey. Known as “the Sybil of the Rhine,” she corresponded with many of the leaders of the time, including popes and bishops, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, and Eleanor of Aquitaine. She once described herself as “a feather on the breath of God.” Stephen described how he had come to study her as a student, and how she was instrumental in leading him towards the Church. He has already published several scholarly articles about her, and his translation and commentary of one of her works is forthcoming from Oxford's Clarendon Press.

The next meeting of the Our Lady of Providence ward will be on Saturday, May 12. May is Mary's month, so join us to celebrate: Morning Prayer at 9 a.m., followed by Mass at 9:30 and recitation of the rosary, with a special event and festal breakfast.

Phoebe Pettingell

This letter comes with all best wishes and prayers for a joyful Eastertide. I remain, faithfully,

Your Pastor and Priest,

Fr. John D. Alexander

O you gentlest branch

O you gentlest branch
 sprouting from the stem of Jesse,
 O how mighty an achievement,
 that divinity looked at the most
 beautiful daughter -
 just as an eagle
 sets his eye on the sun -

when the supernal Father contemplated
 the brightness of the Virgin,
 when He desired His Word
 incarnate in her,

for in the mystical mystery of God,
 as the Virgin's mind was illumined,
 a marvelously-bright flower
 went forth from that Virgin

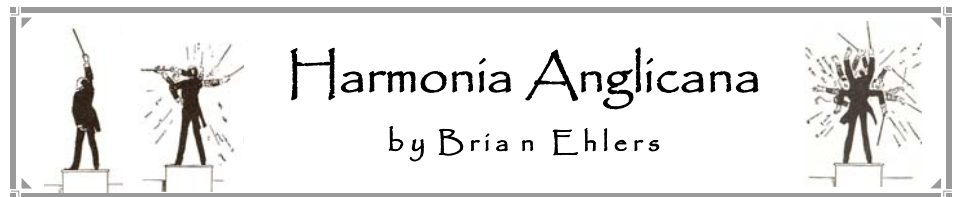
when the supernal Father contemplated
 the brightness of the Virgin,
 when He desired His Word
 incarnate in her.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
 and to the Holy Spirit
 as it was in the beginning

when the supernal Father contemplated
 the brightness of the Virgin,
 when He desired His Word
 incarnate in her.

Above is a responsory by Hildegard of Bingen, a twelfth-century saint who wrote both music and words for a collection of seventy songs for use in monastic worship. It was most probably sung as part of the night service of Matins. We celebrate Hildegard's feast-day on September 17th.

This responsory for the Virgin Mary is characteristic of Hildegard's songs. We find a swift series of images - the branch from Isaiah fused with language from the account of every tree good to eat from Genesis, St. Isidore of Seville's image of contemplation as the eagle staring into the sun -- praising the Virgin in the glory of her cosmic beauty. There is a contrast between God's "mighty achievement" and the Virgin's gentleness. Her beauty inspires desire when the Father beholds her. The Virgin appears passive and active at once, "actively receptive" as the Anglo-Catholic theologian John Milbank puts it. Mary's active receptivity becomes the



In recent columns I have introduced you to the new choir members who are all quite young, either in college now or recently graduated. Now I want to reintroduce you to a long time choir member who is also our oldest and tallest (6' 7"). He is **Michael Swanson**, bass. He can easily be recognized because he looks like Santa, although Michael tells me there's less resemblance now that he has lost forty pounds. Michael is Professor of History and American Studies at Roger Williams University in Bristol, Rhode Island. At this time he's not singing anywhere but S. Stephen's but has been singing in one sort of choir or other since junior high school. He went to a private high school, Minnehaha Academy in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which had a superb choir/choir director. By the time he graduated he had sung all six Bach motets, the Brahms Requiem, Handel's Messiah and was hooked on choral singing. He went to college in Chicago and four more years of choir singing, and graduate school in Cleveland, Ohio where he sang with the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus for eight years. The first half of those was under the baton of Robert Shaw. Michael tells me he had the chance to sing for some amazing conductors: Pablo Casals, George Szell, Leonard Bernstein, and Eugene Ormandy! He was introduced to Anglican liturgy at St. James in Cleveland where he came as an Easter Week replacement in 1963 and wound up staying as cantor until 1972. It was in that year that he came to Bristol and Roger Williams University. He can't remember exactly how long he's been with the Schola, but "...the dove had returned to the ark with the olive leaf about the same time I joined." We can all thank him for providing the seed money to produce each of the two CDs of James Busby conducting the S. Stephen's choir.

Steven Serpa, countertenor, tells me that he recently gave a recital in South Carolina that went very well. He also tells me that he hasn't been singing as much as usual which is fine because his composing is picking up. His flute sonata was performed at a regional conference of the National Flute Society and he has also been taking lessons from a composer in NYC.

Derek Labrie, tenor, graduated from the University of Rhode Island in 2005 with a degree in music composition. He has been singing with the choir since then. He also teaches piano to beginning students at URI through the music preparatory program there. I was quite surprised to learn that Derek also plays keyboards in the jam band *Flower Eyed Monster* which plays a lot of *Grateful Dead* and folk. Jam band? I've asked Derek to invite me to one of his gigs so I can learn more about it. Certainly is different than singing Palestrina at S. Stephen's! Derek works behind the counter at *Pastiche*, a bakery and coffee house located on Federal Hill. It's my opinion that *Pastiche* makes and sells the best cakes and fruit tarts in the city.

It should be apparent to those of you who regularly read my column that S. Stephen's choir is made up of excellent and dedicated multi-talented musicians. They are a fun group, too! How fortunate we are to have them and their talented leader, organist and choirmaster **James Busby**.

source of God's love given to the world. The refrain grows in intensity. We come to share the Virgin's active receptivity as we participate in the liturgy. The single moment is paradoxically repeated till the liturgical form reveals the mystery of the Incarnation in eternity.

Stephen D'Evelyn

The S. Stephen is published nine times a year, September through June, by S. Stephen's Church in Providence, 114 George St., Providence, RI 02906, The Rev'd John D. Alexander, Rector
 Phone: 401-421-6702,
 Email: office@sstephens.necoxmail.com
 Fax: 401-421-6703
 Editor: Karen Vorbeck Williams, 434-6723
 vorkar@cox.net
Contributors this month: Brian Ehlers, Phoebe Pettingell, Stephen D'Evelyn, Brian Ehlers and the Rector
Deadline: the fifth day of the month.
www.sstephens.org

BOOK NOTES: by Father Alexander

Fr. Benedict J. Groeschel, CFR,
A Still, Small Voice:
A Practical Guide on Reported Revelations
 San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993.

In our monthly meetings of the Society of Mary, we recently watched the classic film *The Song of Bernadette*, which recounts the story of Bernadette Soubirous and the 1858 apparitions of Our Lady of Lourdes. Our discussion of the film got us talking about the place of such visions in the life of the Church. In the course of our conversation, I remembered this little book by Fr. Benedict Groeschel that I first read some years ago. At length, at our March meeting I gave a presentation on private revelations based on the contents of this book.

Throughout Christian history many individuals have claimed that God, an angel, or a saint has appeared to them in a vision, or spoken to them with a special message. The general name for such a vision or message is a private revelation. Sometimes such private revelations are commemorated in whole new devotions on the part of countless numbers of the faithful. Sometimes the place of the revelation is marked by a shrine, such as those at Lourdes in France and Fatima in Portugal. Sometimes such revelations fail to gain acceptance by the Church and remain the subject of controversy, as at Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Private and Public Revelation At the outset, Groeschel puts private revelations in proper perspective by contrasting them with public revelation. In the Christian understanding, the repository of public revelation is the Bible. Public revelation is addressed to all people at all times. It is the source of what the Church teaches and commends for belief by all the faithful. Private revelations differ from public revelation in that they are either addressed only to specific people, or their messages concern a specific place, time, or set of circumstances.

Another key difference is that even when the Church approves a private revelation for acceptance by the faithful, such acceptance remains optional. Thus, for example, the Roman Catholic approval of the Lourdes apparitions says only that these apparitions are probably authentic. They have been found to contain nothing contrary to Scripture or authoritative Catholic teaching. Individual Church members are free to accept them, but are not required to do so. One may doubt or even disbelieve such a private revelation and still remain a faithful Christian.

For this reason, private revelations are not used to decide matters of doctrine, or even matters with little or no relationship to the revelation itself. Their use is circumscribed and generally limited to the situation in which the revelation occurred.

Categories of Private Revelations Groeschel provides a helpful discussion of four different categories of private revelation: authentic, questionable, false, and fraudulent.

The Church may approve a private revelation as authentic in several ways. The simplest is a diocesan council

convened by the local bishop. On examination of the evidence, such a council may rule that the revelation can be accepted as probable. This is what happened at Lourdes. A less formal type of approval comes from a persistent tradition of devotion to a private revelation over a long period of time. For example, the appearance of Our Lady of Walsingham in the eleventh century has been verified by centuries of devotion to the present day. Finally, adding the commemoration of a private revelation to the liturgical calendar indicates the Church's strong approbation. (An interesting aside is that the canonization of the recipient as a saint adds credibility to revelations that the saint may have received but does not directly address the question of their authenticity. Some saints have received private revelations that turned out to be false. Conversely, St. Teresa of Avila warns that one may well receive an authentic revelation from God and still be very far from sainthood.)

Far more numerous than approved private revelations are those that are questionable. In fact, all private revelations start out in this category. And all that are neither approved as probable nor condemned as false or fraudulent remain in this category.

The category of false—as distinct from fake or fraudulent—revelations applies to those received by persons who in all sincerity are convinced of the divine origin of what they have experienced. The possible causes of false revelations are many. They may come from the inner depths of the psyche or they may come from the devil. Many devout and intelligent people have been misled by false revelations.

Fake or fraudulent—as distinct from false—revelations are those that have been knowingly fabricated by dishonest people. Such frauds can deceive large numbers of people who are subjectively disposed to believe them.

Sources of Error Groeschel devotes an entire chapter to potential sources of error in private revelations. His point is that while a revelation may be authentic, the recipient always interprets it subjectively according to his or her subjective worldview. Also, the recipient may make honest mistakes in understanding, remembering, and reporting the revelation. An authentic revelation may have elements of the recipient's own experience mixed in that are not genuine revelations but are reported as such. This potential for error is another reason why the Church attests the authenticity of private revelations as only probable rather than as certain or absolute.

False Revelations Groeschel describes two types of false revelations that are prevalent today. At one extreme, the New Age type often presents a "kindly, luminous, and airy picture" of Christ. At the opposite extreme are what Groeschel calls "The Angry Revelations"—visions of horror suggesting that most of the Church and its bishops are on the slippery slope to hell.

Beyond these two camps, Groeschel notes the syndrome of "revelation addicts" who spend all their time being fascinated with reports of new visions and revelations while neglecting Scripture and the teaching of the Church—and who



The Virgin of the Underpass

thus make themselves particularly vulnerable to the possibility of deception by false revelations.

Some Principles of Discernment Groeschel counsels an approach to reported revelations that steers a middle course between the extremes of skeptical rejection and naïve credulity. He suggests four principles of discernment for those called upon to evaluate alleged private revelations:

1. Remain calm. Don't get caught up in the emotions surrounding the revelation one way or the other.
2. Learn as much as you can before making any judgment.
3. Do not make any hasty judgments. Take as much time as necessary. There is no need to arrive at total conviction one way or the other.
4. Resist the temptation to consider any one piece of evidence as ultimately conclusive, especially alleged miracles. False revelations have been known to be accompanied by wildly paranormal manifestations.

Short Cuts While one should never be too hasty in concluding that a private revelation is authentic, Groeschel also suggests that the presence of any of the following suffices to rule out authenticity at once:

1. The recipient or seer is clearly mentally ill, or the revelation contains psychotic content
2. The content of the alleged revelation is clearly contrary to Scripture and the teaching of the Church.
3. The content of the revelation, while not heretical, is inconsistent with the teaching of the Church—e.g., it includes accusations of sin and defamation of character directed at specific individuals.
4. The alleged visionary manifests an attitude that is defiant, proud, judgmental, or provocative.
5. The revelation contains a prophecy that turns out to be false—e.g., that the world will end on a certain date (and it doesn't).
6. Evidence emerges that the recipient is involved in magic or the occult. This is sufficient to discount the revelation at once.

Other bad signs include the following: the recipient regarding as a sin the unwillingness of others to accept the revelation; a strong desire by the recipient for further visions or spiritual favors; and the recipient's insistence that others must make decisions in accordance with what has allegedly been revealed.

Conclusion: Keeping Proper Perspective Groeschel keeps coming back to his basic position that private revelations are to be accepted with humility and gratitude when they occur, but must always be kept in perspective. They are not the most important part of the faith. "The consistent and authentic pursuit of a holy life leading to a loving union with God is the essential element of true religion" (24).

The following paragraph sums up Groeschel's position and serves as a fitting conclusion to this review:

"The public revelation is available to all. It is most important to keep this truth in mind. Do you want to know the certain and direct revelation of God? Pick up a Bible and read it! Do you want to be speedily and mysteriously in the presence of Christ? Reverently and prayerfully visit the Blessed Sacrament! Do you want to see and touch Jesus Christ? Serve the poor! These means are available to all, and they are incontrovertibly true" (24-25).

All in all, Fr. Groeschel has written an enormously helpful guide to understanding and evaluating private revelations. He takes their reality seriously, believing that God still speaks to his people in a variety of ways, but always seeks to keep them in the perspective provided by the public revelation of Scripture. This work belongs on the bookshelf of anyone who has the slightest interest in the subject.

Rogation Sunday *(Continued from page one)*

we respect our neighbors and love ourselves must remain. Knowing the difference between the two is part of our maturing.

Rogation Sunday is a time to remember the blessings of nature, to give thanks for them and to remember that what we have is given only by the grace of God and there to be shared.

Karen Vorbeck Williams

Kenneth R. Miller Spoke to Full House at S. Stephens

The Great Hall was packed to the rafters for Biology Professor and author Kenneth R. Miller's slide illustrated talk, *God, Darwin and Design: What America's New Battle Over Evolution Means for the Church*, on Sunday, March 18th.

Many gathered first in The Lady Chapel for Evensong, followed by the Brown professor's lecture, which was attended by a number of students, faculty and visitors. Members of the parish also turned out in large numbers to hear Miller, a scientist who is also a practicing Catholic, explain evolution in terms that embrace his faith. Miller is a dynamic speaker and we came away both enlightened and entertained.



S. Stephen's Church in Providence
114 George Street
Providence, RI 02906
Address Correction Requested



SOLEMN EVENSONG & BENEDICTION

ASCENSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

MAY 20, 5:30 PM

THE REV'D PATRICK T. GRAY, PREACHER
Curate of the Church of the Advent, Boston

THE SCHOLA CANTORUM
under the direction of
JAMES BUSBY
Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis (*The Second Service*)
by William Byrd
Antiphon (*Five Mystical Songs*)
by R. Vaughan Williams