

December 29, 2019

By Tom Weikert

I Christmas: Isa. 61:10-62:3, Ps. 147: 13-21, Gal. 3:23-25 and 4:4-7, John 1:1-18

The Passing of the Torch

Let us pray: O God our times are in your hands. Be with us now we reflect together on the coming of a new year, on the coming of the Savior, and on the coming of the Spirit in Baptism. **Amen.**

Merry Christmas! This is a great day to celebrate beginnings; of course on Wednesday next we toss the old calendar-unless we want to save some beautiful picture for a project we will probably never get to-We with the press of a key literally turn the page on our digital calendar. A New Year! We may sigh in relief that 2019 is finally over or we may sigh in sorrow that it's happier events can not be repeated or we may sigh in hope for things to come in 2020, we sigh!

I think this is also a good day to think about the Changing of the Guard and the Passing of the Torch. The people of my generation, guardians of the Faith and the Torch-bearers of God's Truth in our time, are passing away. I lost a brother-a YOUNGER brother- in March, many other of my relatives and friends are feeling the nudge from Father Time, and yes, I've got those aches and pains too. My generation, according to the journalists and sociologists, is of the people born between 1928 and 1945. We came after the Greatest Generation, so named to celebrate their victories over the Great Depression and Fascism, and we were labeled-and libeled-as the Silent Generation.

I've always resented that label. Silent Generation, like we were a big nothing? Yes we were fewer in number than our predecessors, the anxieties of the '30s (imagine 25% unemployment) and the separations of the World War II years saw to that. We did speak and sing and chant and sometimes yell, perhaps not as much as those who came after us. We did work and not just to get rich either; many of us worked fervently to preserve the hard-won gains of our predecessors. The world is better for our efforts. Today a greater percentage of people live in freedom and a smaller percentage of people live in poverty than ever before in history.

Yet pass on we must. OK Boomers, your turn. And your turn Gen X and Millennials and Gen Z and, yes, Colton Niculus, our candidate for Baptism today. Your turn to hold the torch of freedom, to be the guardians of prosperity, and, to carry the cross of the faith. For if you would be Christian you must carry that cross. You must be martyrs for you must be witnesses; martyr means witness in Greek; all Christians are in some way martyrs. Think of the commemorations on our church calendar from last week. On Thursday, the day after Christmas, we remembered the first Deacon Stephen, a Red-Letter martyr who died for preaching the Faith. Stephen, who, full with the Holy Spirit, was granted a vision of the Glory of God and of the heavens opened and of Jesus at the right hand of God. Stephen, who with his last words and full of love forgave those who threw stones at him until he died. You probably won't be called upon to be a Red-

Letter martyr but there are such today, people who carry the Cross even though it endangers their very lives, people in Nigeria and Egypt and Cuba and too many other places. You can pray for them and perhaps work to find ways to relieve their suffering.

On Saturday, yesterday, the church honored the memory of the Holy Innocents, the little children assassinated by Herod's minions in his fruitless search for Jesus. None of them were old enough to know sin or Jesus its remedy-yet they were witnesses, martyrs to the truth that the innocent do suffer: remember the innocent children of today, pray for them, and work to relieve their suffering.

In between these commemorations, on Friday, the Church remembered John the Evangelist, author of the glorious Prologue to his Gospel, the eighteen verses we read today. John was not murdered like Stephen or the Innocents, tradition has it that he suffered a different kind of martyrdom for his witnessing; he was exiled to the island of Patmos. Patmos, a poor nothing nowhere rock, three miles one way and four the other; Patmos, far from friends and the culture John loved. Boomers, XYZers, Colton Niculus, if you witness, if you carry the Cross, that is the kind of martyrdom you are most likely to endure. Oh, you probably won't be sent off to a rock, although you should not count out the possibility; Christians today still get exiled or otherwise isolated. If you carry the Cross today, young friends, in this extraordinarily rich and free society, you may encounter personal hostility, you will have to swim in an antagonistic culture, you will have to deal with an increasingly unfriendly government, and, perhaps worst of all, you will face unrelenting indifference. Pray for each other and work to find ways to overcome hostility, antagonism, and indifference with the Love of Christ.

You have tools to help you in that work. You have Rev. Debra's Christmas sermon she posted for us on Facebook. Remember the beautiful finches and remember we have a Savior and rejoice! You have hymns like "Hark the Herald Angels Sing"; think on John Wesley's words: "Hail Incarnate Deity...Everlasting Lord Christ...Born to heal and raise us" from the water of Baptism to eternal life. You have the Holy Scriptures you hold in your hands. Take them home, meditate with them, let them inform your prayers. Take home Isaiah 61:10 and greatly rejoice, with your whole being rejoice; exult in the God who has clothed you with salvation, covering you with His righteousness...and then (62:1) do not keep silent about it! Take home Psalm 147: 17-19; yes, God gives us sometimes unwelcome snow, frost, hail, and worse; yet He sends forth his Word, Jesus the Christ to melt them all and again the waters of salvation flow! Take home the lesson from Galatians: God has sent his Son to redeem us and make us his children again! Take home the glorious beginning of John's Gospel: Jesus, God's Word, is life and light to dispel the darkness from any and all shadows.

Oh God we rejoice! We face down all our difficulties with the new light of the incarnate Word poured out on us. Enkindle that light, make it fire in our hearts to shine out in our lives. Amen.