

IN NOMINE JESU

INTEGRITY IN THE FAITH THROUGH GOD'S GRACE

Our homily for the fourth Thursday of the Trinity Season, this day the Church in this place has chosen to remember the Faith that God gave His servant William Alvin Dudley, is taken from the Gospel of St. John. Hear the Word of the Lord:

Jesus said to him, "Because you see Me you have believed? Blessed (are) the ones not having seen and having believed!"¹

Marillyn, Karen, Jaclyn, Kimberly, family and friends of Bill Dudley:

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

In the Church's rite of Confirmation, those who are being confirmed in the good confession of the Faith hear questions and make promises. One set of those read and respond like this, as a pastor asks: *Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it? And the confirmand responds: "I do, by the grace of God."*

On April 3, 1955, Saint William Alvin Dudley made such a promise. Bill was and is a man of integrity. By the grace of God, he was held fast in that word of promise until God released Bill from that vow on June 14, 2013. You see, Bill no longer needs to keep his word of promise, for God has kept His Promise. That means that these words have become eternally true for Bill:

Jesus Christ, Whom you have not seen, all of you sacrificially love. One Whom you have not now seen, Him you continually believe, and you continually

¹ John 20:29.

rejoice with joy unspeakable also having been filled with glory, continually receiving the End of the Faith, the salvation of your souls.²

The End of the Faith, the present and eternal salvation of his whole person, is that which has been received by Bill Dudley. That is so because of the integrity of the Word of God. That means that which God says He will do, He does without fail. He does so in His time, in His ways, according to His chosen means.

In the beginning of that which the Church celebrates today, when God promised eternal life to His son Bill, God gave him his eternal Name with the Water and Word of Holy Baptism. Throughout his mortal life, God was faithful in His baptismal promises to Bill. He brought His forgiveness every day to the man. He granted Bill a long, rewarding, and honorable career. God gifted his man of integrity with a faithful and loving wife for more than fifty-eight years. God provided Bill with the love of a daughter, and from her, gave him a son-in-law. From that union, God brought forth two loving granddaughters, and has begun to extend the family through them.

Through His Word, God preserved Bill from eternal evil, and granted him forgiveness when he failed to keep God's Word perfectly. God, in Christ, sustained Bill throughout this mortal life for that which he now has – the Promise of life in Christ. From that we believe Bill will receive the coming resurrection of that body in a glorified eternal state. That which we behold today, a body sown in the weakness of

² *1 Peter 1:7b-9.*

the flesh, mortal, perishable, will be raised imperishable at the Last Day. That is an eternal reality, sustained by the integrity of God through His eternal Word of Truth.

That Truth Bill believed throughout his earthly life, and most especially as it drew to a close. Because Bill chose the central text for today, Jesus' Word recorded in the Good News of St. John's inerrant, divinely inspired record, you are to know that he desires you to believe as he does now. The sum of that belief is this: Jesus died bearing your sins – which come upon you every time you break any one of those words engraved in stone under the cross there. Jesus paid the price to rescue you from sin and death, that the eternal Word would be true for you as it is right now and forever for Bill Dudley. This Word is declared fulfilled in Christ Jesus that you may know that this congregation has integrity in the Word of God as God has revealed it to His Church without error across the generations:

When you pass through fire, not you will be consumed, and now will you burn up.³

Saint Bill has been delivered by the grace of God through all the fiery trials of this life. All of these words today are also being proclaimed that you might find yourself doing that which Bill often did before he fully entered the eternal glory of God. That is, he heard it, reflected upon it, and had it work in him. He was, on account of the integrity which God worked in him, attentive to the proclamation of the Word of God.

³ Isaiah 43:2b

From that, many times over the past years Bill would send an email, or make a phone call, or perhaps catch a pastor for a word, or stop in for a chat about that which he had heard preached in a given sermon. Bill would discuss that which he heard; he would often wrestle with it for some time. Without going into detail, Bill would from time-to-time say something like this: “Well, Pastor, Marillyn and I had quite a discussion about the sermon today in the car as we were going home...” Then, with a twinkle in his eye, he would say words to this effect, “That is what you intended, wasn’t it?” Yes, Bill, it is.

Integrity is saying and doing that which is right, by God’s revealed measures, even if it costs you. Integrity in the Faith comes through God’s grace. Even if the good confession in word and deed causes you to suffer all, even death, God, in His integrity, moves to hold you fast in the Truth. Those of us, who have served in the military in times past, when integrity and honor were real values, not just concepts to be mouthed, understand integrity. You can believe, in the four decades of his Air Force service, Bill’s integrity was tested. By the grace of God, by force of personality, by the conviction that his word was his bond (a concept to which a few of us still cling) Bill was kept in his integrity.

When his time of honorable service to our country ended, Bill took his commitment to integrity into volunteer work. His heart was opened by the Faith God worked in him to give to those who also had served, as well as to serve those who still

serve in our Armed Forces. His heart was moved to go beyond the civil realm into service in the Church. His will was moved to learn new skills for service – revealed in his work for youth in the community, and for watching over those who live in Sun City. In his integrity, Bill honored his wife’s requests – including doing his husbandly duty in consuming the adult beverages needed to provide for the blue “flower vases” you have, or will, see after this service as you gather in the Fellowship Room for conversation and remembrance.

That Bill did and said all the good for which his friends, family and acquaintances know him is all a result of the Faith which God worked in him. Bill was not working for a place in heaven, nor, really, even honor on earth. Yet, both have come to him. The good that Bill did, the testimony that he leaves for us, is all a result of God’s working the fruits of the Faith in him. It is proof that God wills to fulfill these words in those who hold fast to Him in the integrity of the Faith:

Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by Name, for you are mine.⁴

Last Friday, God sent His angels to bear the servant whom He bought with the price of His Son, Jesus’, blood, the man whom God called by His Name into the heavenly realms. His fight is over, the victory has been won. The full glory of Christ’s conquering death is his.

⁴ Isaiah 43:1b.

That should be no surprise to those who know the Dudleys. They met on July 4, and Bill fell asleep in the Lord on July 14, a fitting patriotic reality for them who were together as one flesh faithful to the end. That commitment to the American ideal was and will be displayed in the uniform he bears unto the Last Day, and the flag which will cover his casket when this Lord's service to us ends. Our country has its honors for those who have served.

Well, so in greater measure, does the Church of Jesus Christ. Bill's mortal remains are covered with the white pall which is only to be used for those who fall asleep in the Lord in the good confession of the Faith. His casket touches the baptismal font as a reminder of the flood which washed away his sins so long ago. These things are depicted that you might know that Bill's immortal soul lives on in the Presence of Jesus. There his soul has been joined alongside those of all the faithful of all time.

Less than a week ago, as we reckon time, the words of God you heard today, the Word of God which is proclaimed that those who hear His Word might believe in Jesus as their only Savior, came completely and finally true for Bill. In the integrity of the Faith, by the grace of God, Bill maintained the eternal truth that Jesus is the One Who shed His blood into death to rescue us from sin, death and hell. That is the blessing which comes from those who have been blessed with the Faith, as Jesus still declares:

"Because you see Me you have believed? Blessed (are) the ones not having seen and having believed!"⁵

Because Bill chose those words to be proclaimed on this day, they declare his intent that you would hear and hold fast to the integrity of the Word of God in Jesus the Christ. That is namely, that the Faith is not something you apprehend by your grasping, your good works, good life, or even good intentions. The Faith is God's gift. He gives this without your handling or touching God – though for the faithful it is certainly sustained by such – I speak of a mystery which those who are of the Faith know. The Gift of the Faith comes with the hearing of God's Word, in specific, the Word of God's grace, mercy, forgiveness, salvation, and life given in Christ Jesus. It is that which is declared today that you might have integrity in the Truth. That brings with it the hope of eternal life right now. That produces the good confession which declares that, on account of God's holding fast to His promises – God's integrity – you will see William A. Dudley raised again from the dead, clothed in an imperishable body, free from cancer, heart afflictions, and all the troubles of this fallen creation.. Truly blessed are you who have not seen Jesus bodily and yet continue to believe in Him.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Trinity III, Thursday
Funeral Service for William A. Dudley
Isaiah 43:1-3a; I Peter 1:6-9; John 20:19-31
June 20, 2013

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

⁵ John 20:29.