

*In Nomine Jesu*

## **A DIVINE GIFT IN THE LAST DAYS**

Our sermon for this Tuesday of the Lenten season is drawn from today's readings. They are the same as were heard on January 15, 2016 in the funeral service for Debbie Cowles. They are fitting today, as they help us remember the union God worked between them for 53 years. They also give us reason to rejoice in the reunion they have had in Christ Jesus since March 2 this year. Hear again the theme text chosen for this day that has been given to us for offering thanks to God for His faithfulness to William Arthur Cowles:

*My sheep hear My Voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give to them life eternal, and they will definitely not be destroyed into the aeons; and neither will anyone snatch them from My Hand. The Father of Me, He has given (them) to Me, He of all (things) greater remains, and no one has power to snatch them from the Hand of the Father. <sup>1</sup>*

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

William, Craig, Penny, family and friends of Bill Cowles, God has gathered us here today to remember the gift of the Faith, offered continually, and ignored off and on throughout more than seven decades, was, at the end, on account of God's gracious love, no longer rejected or ignored by the son He adopted through water and the Word. That God restored him to a good confession of the Faith in the end is an eternal miracle. Our departed brother is now eternally living proof of the Divine Will to fulfill Jesus' Word as given by St. John for us to hear repeatedly

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<sup>1</sup> John 10:27-29.

today:

*My Father has given (them) to Me, He remains greater than all, and no one has power to snatch them from the Hand of the Father.*<sup>2</sup>

From God's keeping that promise for Saint Bill, this morning we were empowered to boldly pray to God, "We thank you that You have granted Bill ample time for reflection upon Your merciful kindness to the fallen children of men and have given him to drink of that well of water which springs up to eternal life."<sup>3</sup> That was a fitting offering of thanks to God. Here, in this building, in his home, in hospitals and rehab centers, God has been speaking His Word of Grace to Bill for more than a decade and half. It is appropriate to pray after anyone has fallen asleep in Christ. It is abundantly good to offer such words to God during this penitential season.

In this Lenten 40 days, which began on February 14, the faithful of the Church have been called to remember that we have come from the dust, and that to the dust we shall return. This past Ash Wednesday, which was also Valentine's Day this year, gave occasion for Bill and me to visit at Copper Health. He greeted me, sitting in a wheelchair. A cross of ash had been marked upon his head. He held in his hand a Valentine card and gift that he and the other patients had received that afternoon.

Such a combination of cross-marked ashes and symbols of love provides us now with an image of God's unconditional love for sinners, all of whom are destined for the dust. It is from the Heart of God that He sent

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<sup>2</sup> John 10:29.

<sup>3</sup> Bulletin, p. 3.

His Son to die and be buried in our sins. He carried them into the dust of a new grave. Then, having paid the wages of sin, out of His Divine Heart of Love, God raised Him from the dead. The eternal reality of Jesus' death and resurrection provides comfort for all who mourn in hope for those who have fallen asleep in the Faith. This God's Word first delivered to a church long ago declares to us:

*If we believe that Jesus died and rose, even so God will lead together with Him the ones having fallen asleep through Jesus.<sup>4</sup>*

Back at Copper Health, Bill spoke of wanting to know more of such truths as he wheeled himself back to his room while I walked alongside. He, in deep emotion with tears, joy and thankfulness, spoke of the love of God that he had continued to experience since his collapse at home.

When we arrived in his room, I sat across from him. I opened the Word of God to proclaim God's love into his newly receptive ears. We discussed further reminders of the love that God holds for him and all who desire to turn from their sins and live in His grace.

He asked to be taught to pray, and when reminded that Jesus had already given him the words, we prayed the Lord's Prayer together. Bill also confessed the Apostle's Creed (which you also just recited). That day, our brother spoke its words from memory. How wonderful it was for him to hear his own lips speak words that proclaim the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who loved him then, and loves him now and forever.

Your father was a man transformed! He confessed that he truly

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:14.

understood and believed that Jesus died to forgive him his sins. He said he was full of God's love, and that it was unlike anything he had ever known and experienced. He declared that he finally really knew and believed that Jesus rose from the dead to grant him eternal life.

By God's grace, from the time of his recovery from slipping out of his chair, unto the end of his mortal days, Bill clung to that good confession of the Faith. Each time we visited, he was hungry to hear God's Word, and wanted to ask questions and talk about that which he had heard. Even in the ICU at the end of February, he wanted to hear God's forgiveness. That he received!

That testimony is God's gift for you today. Our brother's faith at the end serves as a proof for us today that Jesus is ever faithful to His revealed Word. Such has been given repeatedly to us today:

*My sheep hear My Voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give to them life eternal, and they will definitely not be destroyed into the aeons; and neither will anyone snatch them from My Hand.*<sup>5</sup>

Today, Jesus' Word comes to us to give us comfort and peace. This is delivered to us as we recall God's granting Bill one Divine Gift after another in the last couple of months of his mortal life. They were part of a life-long string of gifts.

The one that came before February 4 this year is the one that changed the man for eternal good. God, through Bill's critical health realities, broke

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<sup>5</sup> John 10:27-28.

through to him out of his years of neglecting His Word. Through an event that reminded our brother of God's love, He called William Arthur Cowles to return to the gift of the Faith he had received long ago in Holy Baptism. He poured out His love upon him, and caused him to treasure that Divine Gift. Out of his return to that treasure, God has delivered our now fully sainted brother into eternal life in Christ. Jesus' promise still stands:

*My sheep hear My Voice, and I know them, and they follow Me...*<sup>6</sup>

Since 2004, in Catalina, the Voice of God had been calling out declaring His love and offering forgiveness to the man who fell asleep in Jesus less than two weeks ago. God, through Debbie's illnesses, entered into the Cowles home with His Word and Sacraments. I am free to tell you now that it was your mother's fervent prayer that her husband of then 42 years would, when he died, have a Christian funeral in this place. Your father was assured about a month ago that his lament that Debbie did not see the change that God's love wrought in him this past January and February was not needed. In the end, Bill heard and believed that she will see him again in the resurrection of the blessed dead.

You see, though Bill waived about the Faith until God granted him the gifts of the last two months, God had never abandoned him. Bill truly heard the Good Shepherd's Voice at the end. He has followed Jesus to the everlasting still waters and green pastures. Remember God's promise that is declared to be for you too:

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<sup>6</sup> John 10:27a.

*I give to them life eternal, and they will definitely not be destroyed into the aeons...<sup>7</sup>*

Jesus has granted the gift of eternal life through His death, resurrection, and ascension. Even so, not everyone is granted the same opportunity Saint Bill had been given. That is, to be raised from the floor of one's home convinced that he had died, and then to live to confess that Jesus is Lord for the rest of his life. To those whom Christ holds in the Faith, as He did for William Arthur Cowles to the end, Jesus still says,

*...no one will snatch them from My Hand.*

*My Father has given (them) to Me, He remains greater than all, and no one has power to snatch them from the Hand of the Father.<sup>8</sup>*

There, you have heard divine rationale for this funeral today, in this Church. God has remained faithful to our brother. Bill, now with his beloved Debbie has followed Jesus from life into life. He wills to be faithful to you that the same may be declared of you when your last hour comes.

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

Funeral Sermon: William (Bill) Arthur Cowles

Lent IV, Tuesday

Psalm 23; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 10:27-29

March 13, 2018

*Pastor Michael A. Morehouse*

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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<sup>7</sup> John 10:28a.

<sup>8</sup> John 10:28b-29.