



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, October 13, 2019
The Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Choral Eucharist
at 11:00 a.m.

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, *Rector*

on

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; and Luke 17:11-19

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Heart Speaks unto Heart: O Sing to the Lord a new Song

Today, in Rome, something remarkable is happening. A former Church of England Priest who, with his Oxford friends ushered in the catholic revival in that Church and who, later, became a Roman Catholic and a Cardinal, is being declared a Saint. It is remarkable because John Henry Newman is the first Englishman born since the Reformation period to be made a Saint and he is the first to have been both Anglican and Roman Catholic – his feast day is in both church’s calendars. But I mention him not only because this is a very special day for Anglicans as well as Roman Catholics (Newman, after all, was a kind of prophetic figure and ahead of his time) but because of his vision for education and formation which is summed up by *faithfulness and thanksgiving*.

Faithfulness and thanksgiving; two words that, for me, also sum up our readings today; faithfulness and thanksgiving. Naaman, the Syrian Commander, felt patronized by the prophet Elisha but his encounter led him to humility and thanksgiving. Paul reminds Timothy that even if we are unfaithful, God is faithful and just to us. And in the Gospel reading, one leper returned to Jesus to thank him. In all three readings, God comes first, and is the source of that faithfulness which leads to thanksgiving.

One of Newman’s great works was titled, ‘The idea of a University’ written in 1873. Education was at the heart of his life from his days in Oxford to his teaching at the Oratory in Birmingham. He not only helped with the founding of the Catholic University in Ireland in Dublin but also founded a school for the Oratory. Once, as an old man, he had to cover a class for a teacher and he wrote in his diary, “*If I could believe it to be God’s will, [I] would turn away my thoughts from ever writing anything, and should see, in the superintendence of these boys, the nearest return to my Oxford life.*”

Newman’s motto on his coat of arms is *Cor ad cor loquitur* - “Heart speaks unto heart.” What better phrase to begin a sermon on our Choir School as it celebrates its centenary which we do with thanksgiving to God and with faithfulness to the vision of its founders. Heart speaks unto heart. A school, like Newman’s idea of the University, is a place of formation as well as education; and a Christian school is a community modelled on the self-giving love of Jesus Christ – a place where spirituality is as important as mathematics. Heart speaks unto heart - a Christian community and a school built on Christian principles is a place where people are not simply open and receptive to God but to one another in selfless love.

In 1913, the Rector, Dr. Ernest Stires, and the Vestry called T. Tertius Noble to become Organist of Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue. Noble came from the magnificent Cathedral of York Minster (the largest Gothic Church in Northern Europe) to a newly-built Gothic church here in New York. Now, York Minster has a choral tradition stretching back over 1000 years; Dr. Noble came to New York with that kind of tradition in his blood, and with the experience of how living in Christian community in a boarding school was at the center of making music. He

came with a vision of how to make that a reality in the church here in America and how he could enhance the beauty of Saint Thomas Church. Stop there for a moment; this magnificent building, whose dedication we celebrated last Sunday, was almost completed. I say 'almost' because the carving of the great Reredos and of all the images that adorn the exterior of the Church had yet to begin and there would be no stained glass for another 14 years. The choir stalls were not yet carved and so Noble came at a very formative time and was part of the beautification of the Church that was newly opened. His beautification came in two forms – the building up of the choral tradition and the founding of a choir school. Now, 100 years later and at a different site and in a purpose-built school, a new generation of boys and faculty continue to keep that tradition alive, true to the vision of T. Tertius Noble. The school's motto, "*Cantate Domino*" comes from the first line of Psalm 98 – '*O Sing unto the Lord.*' The school exists because we put God first - we sing to praise God not to entertain.

The Choir School's mission statement is closely aligned with that of the parish:

The Saint Thomas Choir School houses, nurtures, and educates the boy choristers of Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue. We work together to cultivate a love of learning through challenging academic study and professional musical training rooted in the Anglican choral tradition. Our unique, familial environment fosters self-reliance and personal growth, preparing students to contribute productively to their communities.

Anyone who has toured the school and, in particular, has had lunch with the Headmaster, faculty, staff, and boys knows that sense of family that is at the heart of our Choir School and that makes it unique.

Music is a powerful way of deepening words and symbolic action. Music is at the heart of the liturgical life of the Church, with a history of the singing of psalms and the chanting of prayers in the Synagogue and, earlier, in the Temple of Jerusalem itself. Music is not an end in itself, but it serves the liturgy and builds up the community.

The current York Minster website says this on the choir's home page:

"Music is the heartbeat for daily life at the Minster."

And, indeed, 100 years later, Noble's vision means that the same heartbeat is experienced here in the middle of New York, and we are privileged to have this treasure. Newman's motto, 'heart speaks unto heart,' is lived out in our Choir School and in these choir stalls.

Our own Choir School uses the gift of music as one of the tools by which it builds community and fosters that personal growth that will make a difference to our boys and their lives and communities in the future. Investing in our Choir School is not just investing in the future lives of children, it is investing in communities that are unknown to us all around the world but who will benefit by these young men who are striving to reach their full potential. Perhaps we should return to the Choir School's motto but read the rest of the verse from which it is taken: "O sing unto the Lord **a new song.**" The Choir School is part of a living tradition that will continue to grow and to change as we move into its second century.

Please support our Annual Appeal as we reflect on the Choir School this week. Just as a boy's voice is fragile and changes with adolescence, so we need to remember that our Choir School is also fragile as it relies heavily on the generosity of past worshipers and the gifts of the living members of Saint Thomas Church. Help us make a difference now and in the future through your pledge.

I will let the current Chair of the Alumni Committee, Aaron Primero who graduated in 2005, have the last word:

"My time at the Choir School allowed me to re-imagine myself. It's where I learned to sing, tie a tie, and read Latin. There is no place like it. No school whose mission blends art, worship, scholarship, and service. No table to which, year after year, alums return to break bread with one another on Thanksgiving."

"O sing unto the Lord **a new song.**"