



SERMON 843

Feast Day of John Donne

Fourth Week of Lent

April 2, 2014

939th Week as Priest

765th Week at St Dunstan's

30th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

NO MAN IS AN ISLAND

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

John Donne was a poet and priest, the Dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London, and one of the great preachers of his day. They say that thousands would gather to hear his sermons on an open-air lawn known as St Paul's Cross. He was a friend of the King, James I, and something of a rock star in his own day.

I'm reminded of the televangelists of the present age, people like Joel Osteen, Bishop T.D. Jakes, and Marcus Lamb, who make millions through their worldwide broadcasts, book deals, and tax-deductible contributions—all under the protection of the Internal Revenue Service, a highly-questionable tax exempt status, and their secrecy as non-profit closely-held organizations. "It just ain't right," as my plumber in Fayette would say. "It ain't right."

John Donne lived in an age when personal honor and integrity were everything to a man. He was raised in a wealthy, aristocratic Roman Catholic family and could have been censored or even imprisoned early in his career. But King James knew Donne to be an honorable man, and he asked him to take Anglican holy orders, and I suppose was as difficult for him not to obey the king as it is for me not to obey my bishop. Besides, Donne was discovered to be secretly married to a beautiful young woman whose father was Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, and could not have been a Catholic priest for this very reason.

This was about the time of the first publication of the Authorized Version of the Holy Bible, which we commonly call the King James Bible. This was the standard of Anglican worship from its introduction in 1611 until 1952, when the Revised Standard Version was adopted by the Episcopal Church for use in worship. Many churches still hold to the manifold greatness of the King James. Again, as my Fayette plumber would say, “If it ain’t the King James, it ain’t the Bible.”

So John Donne found himself on the fast track, thanks to his royal friendship and his unique skill set. He was a famous poet during his career as a clergyman, and well-regarded by all. After a few brief appointments in parish churches, Donne found himself appointed to Saint Paul’s, which was (and is) the Mother Church of Anglicanism. It is there that the Kings and Queens of England have worshipped,

and where monarchs, poets, writers, and military heroes are buried with great pomp and circumstance.

Still, John Donne kept the common touch. For example, his short poem, “No Man is an Island,” celebrates the relationships we all need in order to live abundant lives.

No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main

It is a superior way to express our need for community, for friends, for healthy and life-giving relationships—and I believe, for marriage.

any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind

Donne believed that our lives are inextricably connected, and that we depend upon each other for the success of our common life. This is true in society, but it is even more necessary in the life of the Church. We can be “in Christ” as Saint Paul described in his letters, and we can do this alone, without another human being. But we cannot be a part of the “Body of Christ” without a community, a congregation, a gathering of the people of faith. We are “involved in mankind” as Donne suggested, and we are involved in the life and death of every person. As Christian people, we believe in respecting

the dignity of every human being, and as I have often said, each life, your life, is of infinite importance to God.

So, no human being is an island, apart from the rest of us. Each one of us is a part of the congregation, the community, the village, and the family of man. We belong together, and I would say in particular that each one of us belongs to St. Dunstan's. We cannot do without you. **AMEN.**