

The Homily, The Rev. Cn. Nancy L. Moore, Chaplain

May God's word be spoken, may God's word be heard. Amen.

What are we doing here today?

The simple answer is "Electing the Tenth Bishop of Maine." We are fulfilling a canonical requirement: to be a diocese we need to have a bishop, an *episkopos*—that's where our name comes from. We will take our little electronic voting devices and push a button to register our choice, and sooner or later there will be enough votes in both orders to declare there has been an election.

It isn't always done this way, you know.

There are some funny legends of how bishops were chosen in the days of yore. There is a story that St. Martin tried to hide in a goat pen to avoid being chosen, and the geese ratted him out to the crowd by raising a honking ruckus. One of my favorites is the story of a community gathered in the public square, faced with the question who was to be their next bishop, and a bird came along and landed on the shoulder of one young man. The crowd took it as a sign that he was the one called. Didn't seem to matter that he hadn't even been baptized yet! They dunked him, ordained him, and consecrated him. During the Walkabout someone who knew this legend asked if I'd checked for bird poo on the shoulders of any of our nominees' suits.

The last time we did this, eleven and a half years ago, a couple of my parishioners were very, very excited. They grew up in a denomination in which bishops are appointed, and they had never before had any *input* into the choice, much less a vote. Our Lutheran brothers and sisters *do* elect their bishops, but without our lengthy discernment process beforehand. They don't even know for certain who will be on the ballot until they arrive at Synod Assembly!

Back when we were first having conversations about this transition, Maria, our Standing Committee president, joked that maybe we should just take the names of the four or five finalists, put them in a miter and draw one out...*(pull a slip from the jar)*...but no. We have agreed as a denomination and as a diocese that we will elect someone. And this places a responsibility on us, to know not only *what* we are doing, but *why*.

We are not voting for—or against—anyone's gender. Or sexual orientation. Or ethnicity or geographical origins—any more than we would base our vote on eye color or left-handedness.

We are casting a ballot for the one we believe has the gifts to help us shine our Christ light into the darkest corners of the world. The one who will challenge us, encourage us, guide us and prod us to do the work for which God has created us: to loose the bonds of injustice, to let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke. To share our bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into our houses; to cover the naked when we see them...to let our light break forth like the dawn and reveal the glory of God, and to declare with confidence that the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. To let our light so shine before others that they may see our good works, and glorify God. Even—especially—when that means setting aside our metaphorical bushel baskets.

When I met with the diocesan leaders guiding this process on the day the slate was decided, I offered them a way of reminding themselves to trust the process as the responsibility for discernment spread out to the whole diocese. It's a call-and-response declaration of faith: "God is good—*all the time!* All the time—*God is good!*"

God *is* good, all the time. It's so easy to believe that God is good, that God really, really loves us, when the sun is shining and the temperature is just perfect...when we find a twenty in our pocket...when the lab test results tell us all our worry was for nothing. People of faith have no problem declaring "God is good!" when things are going their way and they *feel* blessed.

But here's the thing—here's the hope at the heart of our proclamation.

God is also good when things aren't so great. God really, really loves us even when the rain is leaking through the roof in the middle of the night and we can't find a tarp...when we aren't sure how we're going to pay the bills and put gas in the car...when we're attached to a chemo drip and wondering if there is even going to be a tomorrow.

God is good *all* the time. *All* the time, God is good.

And so, God is good if we have some miraculous, first-ballot result. But God is also good if it takes us several ballots. It may take us some time to clarify for ourselves the vision of who God is calling *us* to be, so that we figure out who is called by God to be our next bishop.

God is good when we welcome our new bishop and his or her family, and God is good when we have to say good-bye to the Lanes and send them on their way.

On that topic...+Steve, you probably will be annoyed by what I'm about to do, but it's important to me that we take a minute to say thank you. Thank you for these past eleven years of leadership. Thank you for all the times you encouraged—or challenged—us to let our light shine, and all the times you sat with us in the darkness. Thank you for tossing aside the bushel basket, pushing us out the door and into the neighborhood and giving us courage to be alight with God's world-changing love. You have been a faithful servant, and we want to take a chance to say, "Well done."

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So what are we doing here today? Why are we doing it?

If we are only here to meet some canonical requirement, maybe we should just turn in our voting devices and go home.

But—if we are willing to step out in faith, if we are willing to risk believing that God is still at work with and among us as the Episcopal Diocese of Maine...willing to dare to be the people God has been calling us to be since the very beginning: to shine with the light of Christ's transforming love in *this* age, in *this* place...willing to find new ways of being followers of the Way of Love, so that others may see and glorify God...willing to dare to proclaim the expansive love of God and embody the radical promise of our faith, that God is good...all the time/All the time...God is good...

Well, that is good, important, world-changing work worth doing.

Amen.