

Prayer of Illumination (Pray with me)

Eternal God, let your Word shine in our hearts and bring light to our souls, that we will recognize our risen Lord and answer his call to follow in faithful discipleship. Amen.

(Our scripture is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians) from chapter 3, beginning in verse 9 through verse 17. Hear the word of the Lord.

I Corinthians 3: 9 – 17

⁹For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. ¹⁰According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder; I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.

¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. ¹⁴If what has been built on the foundation survives; the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

¹⁶Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

This ends the reading.

I've prepared these reflections for you from 2 perspectives. The first

Is from the perspective of a priest & a rabbi who went to a prize fight together. They say when the Jewish fighter got in the ring he jumped up & down & he flexed his muscles, he pounded his chest & he went to the farthest corner.

When the Catholic fighter got in the ring he jumped up & down & he flexed his muscles, he pounded his chest & he made the sign of the cross. And the rabbi looked at the priest & said, "Is that going to help him?" And the priest said, "Only if he can fight."

Point, struggle is something we do ourselves & empty hope is not going to get us there.

I make these remarks also from the point of the Sufi master who says, "If you think your work in life is finished, & you are still alive, it isn't."

Today we celebrate the dedication of the Makemie church building becoming a National Historic Place. And I have a few things to tell, about how this building came about, about Francis Makemie, and about how when we build our lives in relationship to God Almighty we build with gold, silver & precious stones. And when we build separated from a relationship with the one who dwells in us, we build with wood, hay & straw. Life is a struggle and as John Calvin says, "Our only hope is Jesus Christ."

A brief history: in 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany and from that point the reformation began. Some 20 years later, a French lawyer, John Calvin, refined the reformers' new way of thinking about the nature of God and God's relationship with us; how our relationship with God is formed & reformed every day. John Knox, a Scotsman who studied with Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland, took Calvin's teachings back to Scotland. Now, about this same time the English monarchy was Protestant (Episcopalian), but reigned over Ireland which was predominately Catholic. An unsuccessful rebellion by the Catholics in Northern Ireland led to forfeiture of their lands - if not death. In 1603, King James I of England, a Scottish Presbyterian, invited colonists from Scotland to settle on these confiscated lands. This became known as the Ulster Plantation in Northern Ireland and was the beginning of a group of people who have become known as the Scotch-Irish or their preferred name Ulster-Scots. But then Northern Ireland changes back to a Catholic English monarchy, which then turned around and began their own persecution of these Scots in Ireland.

What Francis Makemie saw as a boy growing up in the 17th century in Ireland was not conducive to religious or intellectual freedom. And is often

the case, from oppression & persecution come the building blocks for strong ideals & beliefs. Francis brought these beliefs to America in 1682, to the not yet formally chartered town of Snow Hill, (that would happen six years later) in the county of Somerset. He was 25 years old. He strongly believed that we are called to be free thinkers. He was radical in how he taught & preached of our relationship with God; that we are God breathed, and how God's spirit dwells within each being, we are God's temple.

His beginning of Presbyterianism in America is a tradition, of intellectual strength, new beliefs, and fiery oratory. So fiery and free thinking that his sermons landed him in jail in 1707 in New York City; Lord Cornbury the Governor of New York charged him with challenging the "divine right of kings." "God alone," said Francis is divine. Francis won his case and it became a "landmark decision" for religious freedom & free speech in our developing country. So much so that King George during the revolution of the upstart Americans in the 1770's called this war, "the Presbyterian revolt" so ingrained had the ways of the "free thinkers" become in the building of the new nation.

Now I know this is a lot of history and I have promised to be brief, but one more item, with your permission? When the Declaration of

Independence was signed, the only clergy to sign was the Rev John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian minister.

Knowing this heritage the people of the Snow Hill Presbyterian church in 1883 (the 200th anniversary) decided to build a new church in honor of Francis Makemie. In true Presbyterian tradition, they first raised the funds, \$15,000 and sparing no expense, built this church where we are now gathered and which has been dedicated and entered into the National Historic Register. This beautiful sanctuary where the foundation is the spirit of God.

In the text from 1 Corinthians that I read a moment ago the Apostle Paul says that the life of a Christian is based on the foundation of Jesus Christ. That seems straightforward enough, the kind of comment we expect from an Apostle, but he goes on. It is the work of each individual to build a life on that foundation. What will we use to construct our houses, asks Paul; will they be made from gold, precious stones, hay, wood, or straw? Will we use durable materials or flimsy ones? How will you build your life? The question is important, says Paul, because there will come a day when fire will test the quality of your construction. When we are refined by fire what will be left? Will it be as beautiful as this sanctuary, soaring, colorful,

pleasing? Or will it be ash? Listen to the father of American

Presbyterianism, who says, we are to "Build our life in Christ." Amen.