

SERMON FOR THE 19TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (B), PROPER 23, 15.X.2006
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF SAINT JAMES THE APOSTLE / BROGUE, PENNSYLVANIA
10:00, WOV SERVICE OF WORD & PRAYER, LBW/ SETTING 2
HOLY BAPTISM OF AIDAN GREGORY GLENN SHAULL

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15, Psalm 90:12-17, Hebrews 4:12-16, Mark 10:17-31

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was
and Who is to come. ✠ Amen.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God, for God all things are possible."

--Mark 10:23-27

Debate has raged over what Our Lord meant by this saying ever since He said it, as witnessed in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 19:23-30; Mark 10:23-31; Luke 18:24-30). Does the proverb about the rich man and the

camel 'passing through the eye of a needle' refer to a real camel and a real needle—i.e., to a complete impossibility— or to one gate in the city walls of ancient Jerusalem that was supposed to be so low that, in order to pass through it, a camel would have to kneel—i.e., an image of humility. And what about wealth and riches? Who among the first Disciples, or among us, does not want to have more of the necessities and luxuries of life, if only to guard against a 'rainy day'? And, therefore, who among them or among us can enter the Kingdom of Heaven if total divestiture of what we have and what we want is the basic requirement?

In Mark, Jesus senses the Disciples' dismay, the worry of these big men who were just recently speculating about which one of them would be greatest in God's Kingdom, but who now are worried that they will not gain admittance at all. To those same Disciples who, just an

instant before had tried to prevent children from being brought to Jesus, Jesus now speaks a word of comfort, addressing them as 'children.' Children, like the little child Jesus had placed among the Disciples to illustrate His point, belong to that class of souls who are sure to be admitted into the Kingdom of God. Now Jesus calls His grown followers 'children.' Though they have many cares and worries—the businesses and homes they have left behind to follow Jesus, how they will provide for another wandering multitude if Jesus decides that they are to feed them, what will happen to Jesus and to them if He keeps His appointment with the Cross by going up to Jerusalem—but, despite all these cares and fears and wants, Jesus calls them 'children.' He reminds them of what they truly are before God and of what they are to become by grace.

The rich young man of today's Gospel is *not* hindered by the Disciples from approaching Jesus. We can well imagine that the Disciples, and especially their treasurer, Judas Iscariot, must have thought this fine, upstanding member of the community to be a real gain for the Messiah movement—at long last, a normal person of some means, instead of just the sick and the poor, and a decent, God-fearing fellow with the drive and idealism of youth, by contrast with the broken-down, corrupt moral failures like Zacchaeus and Matthew, those ex-collaborators with the Romans. Here was someone who could really do a lot for the movement.

But, how does Jesus respond to this sincere, righteous, wealthy and vigorously youthful potential follower, supporter and, perhaps, underwriter? *The Rabbi from Nazareth drives him away by raising the bar*

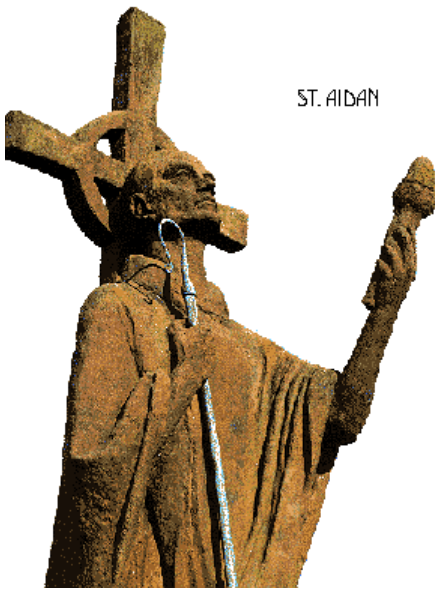
unbelievably high! First it was the divorcees who were left out of the picture of God's plan, and in favor of whom?!—*a bunch of little kids* who are supposed to be examples of following God's Anointed! Now the rich are excluded?! Who will be left? Giving voice to the anxiety of the whole group, Peter reminds Jesus that they have all given up just about everything they have in order to follow Him. Neither the Disciples nor the rich young man in today's Gospel—whom I have always imagined returned to Jesus or became one of the earliest members of the Church after he had prayed and thought and placed his life in a new order—are quite getting them point. Their vision is narrow. Jesus wants to expand that vision by His provocative preaching, to open their eyes to see the whole picture of what God is doing in the world so that they may

see all things in proper perspective and live their lives accordingly.

Aidan Gregory Glenn Shaul, who at this point in his life has few cares except that his most basic needs be met and that he be held and played with by his parents and sister as much as possible, is a prime candidate for the Kingdom of God, of which he will become a member today. He seems not to be weighed down with possessions and may not yet have developed the sense that certain things belong to him. Or, perhaps it is the case that little Aidan Gregory Glenn still sees the whole world as an extension of himself, and that he will need to learn that *not* all things he likes or wants belong in his toy chest, that, as much as he might want to have all of his parents' time or that of his sister for himself, there are lives distinct from his own, lives with their own timetables, needs and wants.

He may have no idea how rich he is in having a large family that loves him, parents and grandparents and Godparents, aunts and uncles and cousins who delight in him, not to mention the universal Church of Jesus Christ, the world-wide Lutheran Communion and this congregation to which he will now belong. He will learn all of this. The way in which he learns it will make all the difference.

Aidan Gregory Glenn Shaul is named for his two grandfathers and for at least two Christian saints.

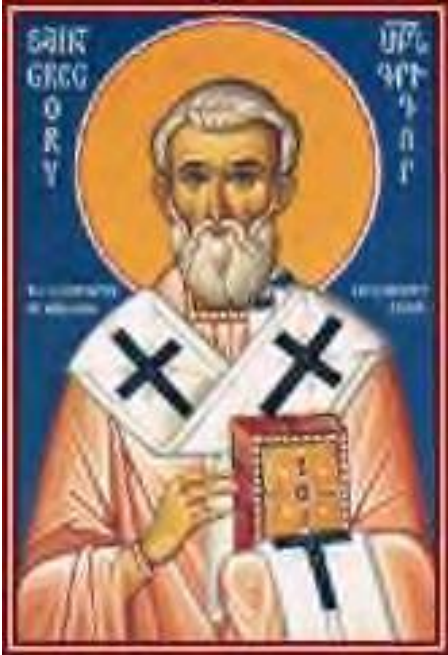


ST. AIDAN

The name *Aidan* means 'fire' in the Irish Gaelic language. Saint Aidan of Lindesfarne was an Irish monk and missionary. He was sent to that region of northern England known as Northumbria in the 7th

Century. True to his name, Aidan was moved by the fire of the Holy Spirit to bring the Gospel to that part of the world where, as a Bishop, he founded a school for missionaries that would do the same work throughout Brittain and all of Europe. Like fire, and in the spirit of today's Gospel, he kept himself free to follow Christ, bound to nothing but love of his Lord and His Church, spreading the Word of God and the life of His Church wherever the fuel of yearning human hearts could be found.

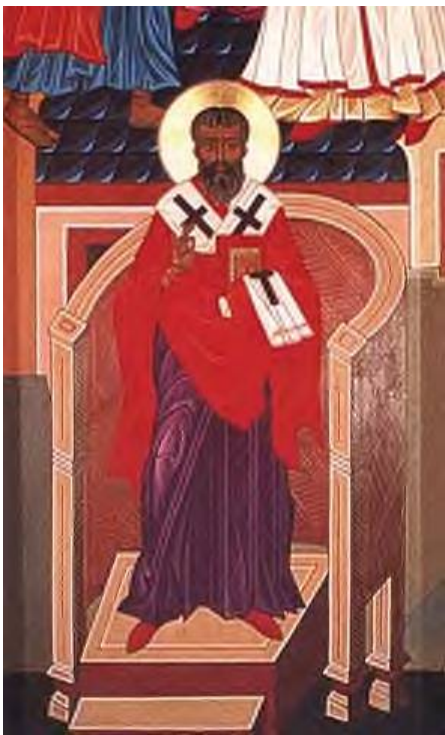
The name 'Gregory,' *Gregorios* means 'wide-eyed' in the Greek language. This refers not so much to a physical trait as to the eyes of faith, to a soul open to wonder and awe in the presence of Almighty God. There are *many* Saints Gregory in the Church's calendar, but two of the most important of these are Saint Gregory the Illuminator and Saint Gregory of Nyssa.



In the last decade of the Third Century, Bishop Gregory was tortured and held captive for thirteen years at the bottom of a dry well by the King of Armenia. Out of that darkness Gregory prayed and sang

hymns daily. His physical life was sustained by the kindness of a widow who was inspired in a dream to bake a loaf of bread and throw it down the well to the bishop every day, which she did, faithfully. Finally, so great was the admiration of the whole people for Gregory as the story of his faith spread that the cruel king relented and ordered Gregory to be hauled up out of the well. The king was there to meet Gregory in his first moment of freedom. While the bishop's eyes were still adjusting to the daylight, the king fell on his knees, begged Gregory's forgiveness for

all he had done to him, and asked to be baptized, making Armenia the first nation whose sovereign accepted baptism in the Christian faith in the year 301. For bringing the light of Christ to the whole nation by living according to the light of faith in the darkest place possible, Bishop Gregory has been known ever after as 'The Illuminator.'



Like Saint Aidan, Saint Gregory of Nyssa was called from his homeland in Greek-speaking Cappadocia (part of the ancient Kingdom of Troy) to serve as bishop in Lower Armenia in the late 4th Century, less than a century after Christianity had been

established as the national religion of that country and its people. Gregory demonstrated his 'wide-eyed' ability to see all sides of controversial and confusing theological problems,

but, above all, it was his wide-eyed contemplation of the mystery of the the Triune God through which the Holy Spirit gave the Church everlasting gifts of doctrine, theology, prayer and gentle Christian wisdom.

The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church into which Aidan Gregory Glen enters today through the waters of Holy Baptism prays with us, in this child's new congregation and family of faith, that His soul and spirit will remain as uncluttered, as unburdened and as unstained by a short-sighted, coldly-calculating attitude toward the finite blessings of this life, toward all that will pass away, and that his vision will remain free by God's grace to see the majesty and mystery of the love of God at work in the world and present in his life, an ever-living flame of faith in his heart. Of such freedom, vision and faith as this is the Kingdom of God! May Aidan Gregory

Glenn not only grow to maturity in that Kingdom, but may the brightness of his faith and love and the wideness of his vision and wisdom lead others there as well! ✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠ Amen.

