

St Thomas' and St Thomas' of the Air Church
Saint Mark
April 25, 2021
rmcneely+

Today and every April 25th, the Church points us toward
The life, work and example of Saint Mark.

Mark, the Evangelist

Author of the second Gospel

Written probably about 60 A.D.

Most likely while he was in Rome

Where Peter was incarcerated

and would soon be murdered

for his faith in Jesus, the Christ.

Mark was with Peter until the end

And it is from Peter

That we think Mark

Heard the word of God

And learned of the life and words of Jesus,

That is contained in Mark's Gospel.

We have no indication that Mark ever laid eyes on Jesus
Or heard His voice.

But by the Grace and the inspired word of God

We hear Mark's voice in his writings

And through him, we hear Peter's voice.

The third century historian Eusebius wrote the early history of the
Christian Church

And confirmed for us the authorship of the Second Gospel.

But there is an illusive character who threads his way

Through the Gospels

And through some of Paul's epistles

That legend and tradition has also associated with Mark.

What is it about Heroes that is so appealing to the Human Nature?

People who are larger than life
 People who achieve greatness
 And who excel, defend and save us?

They are in many cultures

The Greeks had them in their myths
 The Romans as well.
 The Norse legends and myths.

Many indigenous cultures too tell stories of their heroes.

Fictional characters who have magical powers

Or divine powers
 And who stand between us and the evil
 That we fear.

Show us that good will prevail?

Do they give us hope?

Examples of courage?

Do they inspire us to achieve our dreams

By their examples,
 do they inspire us to take on the challenge?

Children of my generation had heroes that we got to know

Via electronic media

First radio, then television, then in the movies.

Our heroes were superheroes, fictional imaginings

Who exemplified the best of human nature.

But before us, heroes were perpetuated in writings,

Books, magazines, and even comic books.

But before them, heroes were not imagined

Not fictional characters.

They were flesh and blood real.

People got to know them in church.

They were not stories told to children by well meaning
 parents and relatives.

They were actual biographical accounts of people who had actually lived and who had actually done the things attributed to them.

They were the Saints.

People who accomplished the impossible

For God

For the church

For the people of God.

They stood where others did not.

They withstood the punishment and terrors of the devil

Refusing to compromise their principles

Standing for Christ

In the face of torture and murder.

We remember them still

Our Prayer Book remembers them each year
on the anniversary of their deaths.

The day they gave their lives.

When the day of their remembrance falls on a Sunday

We give them precedence

feast their memory and all they accomplished.

The Saints were the heroes in the lives of churchmen and churchwomen for centuries.

Their stories were known by all

And their examples guided

and encouraged Christians around the globe.

In our lives, they have been lost to

the age of “enlightenment”

and the oblivion of “progress”.

But their names are with us still.

Silent witnesses to who they were.

Especially here in California

Their names live on because our founders,
 Aspired to the lives of the Saints
 And named cities, roads, lakes, mountains, valleys
 Rivers and other things after them
 As reminders who they were
 And what they did.

Because the Saints dedication to God

And their service to mankind
 Mattered,
 And inspired those who took the care to know of them.

We have become immune to their names and their significance.

In the Anglican tradition, we name our churches after them.

But how many of us know much about St Thomas?

Our own fair city is named for Saint Francis

But when we say his name, do we evoke his memory?

What about all the other saints resident in the names of the Bay Area?

With all that heritage, how have we let our kids and grandkids be inspired by electronic pixels on a TV screen?

Characters who never were,
 Doing things that never happened?

Tradition and the early patriarchs of the Church state that Mark

Was born in Cyrene
 A city of Pentapolis, modern day Libia.
 And later lived with his mother in Jerusalem.

That home by tradition is where the Apostles were

When the resurrected Jesus first appeared to them.

It was that same room when Thomas,
 having joined the others first saw Jesus,

His crucifixion wounds

Knelt and declared “My Lord and my God”.

It was also that same upper room in Mark's mother's home
 When Jesus appeared after His ascension
 And breathed the Holy Ghost upon the 12
 At Pentecost.

What of that illusive character threading through the New
 Testament?
 Who is he?

Some say we meet Mark in Luke's book: "the Acts of the
 Apostles".

Many have concluded that the man Luke calls "John Mark"
 Is the same man who names himself "Mark" in his Gospel.
 John Mark, traveled with St Paul and Barnabas to Antioch
 And Cyprus in the First Journey of Paul.

Paul wrote to Ephesus from his prison cell in Rome
 Asking Timothy to send Mark to Rome.

Peter encountered Mark on his journey through Asia Minor
 And enlisted Mark as his translator and assistant.

Historians place Mark in Rome at the time of the murders
 And martyrdom of Peter and Paul.

Peter writes of Mark in his First Epistle
 As he languished in Nero's prison.
 He refers to Mark as a son.
 A term of endearment in those days, as it is now.

Historians believe Mark's Gospel includes facts
 from the Sermons
 and conversations
 of and by Peter.

But there are other matters of legend surrounding Mark

In the Second Gospel

There is an account of Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And a mysterious young man wearing a large cloth

Who evaded capture when the guards

Seized him by the cloth

Allowing the young man to slip away

Naked

And the cloth in the hands of the guards.

Was Mark writing about himself?

Was he that mysterious young man?

We know the cloth

As the shroud of Turin.

Which was laid over the body of Christ in the tomb

And now bears His image.

Following the martyred deaths of Peter and Paul

Mark made his way to Alexandria

A major Roman free colony at the mouth of the Nile.

Mark founded a large Christian Church there

And was ultimately the Bishop of Alexandria.

The Church is now the Coptic Orthodox Church

Pagans in that city were angered by Mark's success in turning their members away from pagan gods

And on April 25, 68 A.D

They tied a rope around Mark's neck

And dragged him through the city until he was dead.

But the story of Mark did not end there.

His body was interred in Alexandria.

But in 829, two Venetian merchants
 with the help of two Greek monks
 Removed Mark's remains
 from the hands of the Muslim Abbasid Caliphate
 and took Mark to Venice.

Where they ultimately built a magnificent church over his relics
 Which are at rest under the high altar
 At St Mark's Basilica on St Marks Square.

Mark's life is remarkable in that
 he devoted his entire adult life to God.
 assisting Paul on his journeys to spread the Gospel
 assisting Peter and all the while
 accumulating the contents of the Gospel that bears his name.

Mark leaves us his legacy of loyal and dedicated service.
 The Church provides today's Epistle to underscore
 St Paul's familiar metaphor of the Body and the Church.
 Paul reminds us that God gives each one of us
 the grace and talents
 necessary for the life and perpetuation of the church.

Mark was both a writer and evangelist,
 Gifts in abundance from God.

But Paul's point is that all of us receive the grace and gifts
 And we are to use such gifts as we may receive
 to maintain and prosper the church,
 and to continue our individual ministries,
 for the benefit of each other.

Paul thinks of each of us as a critical part of the body
 The church of Christ
 As a living, organic being.
 And that each of us, receiving a different gift or talent
 Form the whole, the Body, the Church.

Each of us contributing to the life of the Church and to each other
The life sustaining love of God.
So that when the whole Body,
fitted together
and compacted by that which each of us supplies,
grows ever closer to God
in the love of God.

Mark gave his life's work expressed in the gift of evangelization.
He ultimately gave his life when he would not recant Jesus or the
truth of His Gospel.

Mercifully we are not all called to do the same.
But the life of Mark, remains a shining example for all who care to
learn about it.

Even our little miracle church needs the gifts and talents of us all.
We are few but we are mighty.
What are the gifts that God has bestowed upon us ?
How are you using them to sustain the work of the Church?
For the ministry God has put before you?
To the betterment of us all?
To the end that we increase and spread the love of God?

