

Being a fan of God. Sermon. Fr. Hugh
Pentecost 14A. St. George. 9/18/2011
Psalm 145. "I will exalt you, O God, my King."

A senior couple were visiting their children and grandchildren over the summer.

Each night the grandfather enjoyed reading bedtime stories to his little granddaughter. On the fourth night he began, "Once upon a time..."

She said, "Grandpa - do all fairy tales begin with 'once upon a time'?" Grandpa said, "Oh no, not all of them. Some of them begin with, "When I am elected President, I promise..."

A lot of people are fans - fans of something. Perhaps you're one. Football fans are enjoying the start of the new season.

Fans will talk about football at any opportunity. A lot of fans know all the key players and their statistics.

They can describe a winning play with all the enthusiasm of a professional commentator.

They can tell you what one player should have done better.

It doesn't matter what the sport is - baseball, basketball, golf, you name it, fans love it and are consumed with it.

The Oxford Dictionary defines a fan as follows:

"fan - an abbreviation for fanatic - an enthusiastic admirer, or supporter."

Some people may not be sports fanatics, but are just as much huge fans when it comes to music, or movies, or the theatre.

Whatever a person's interests, if they're a fan they'll talk about it readily and enthusiastically to anyone who'll listen.

Being passionate about something is a wonderful thing. It adds excitement and enjoyment to life.

As believers in Christ we usually refer to ourselves as Christians, or Episcopalians.

But we could equally well refer to ourselves as 'fans' of God.

However, in our culture we think it perfectly alright to express fanatical enthusiasm at a game or a concert, but not in church, thank you very much.

And that's probably a good thing, because at least in the Episcopal Church we like our services to have a certain dignity about them; and your game watching behavior might not translate very well into a service of Holy Communion. Though it could be interesting.

Nonetheless, without getting into game-watching mode, it is totally appropriate to bring that same level of inner enthusiasm into our worship of God; and to invest the words of our liturgy with a heartfelt passion.

In our Psalm this morning we said,

"I will exalt you, O God, my King, and bless your name for ever and ever.

Every day I will bless you and praise your Name for ever and ever.

Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. There is no end to His greatness."

The whole psalm goes on with enthusiastic expressions of praise for God.

Clearly this Psalm can only be said sincerely by someone who is a big fan of the Lord.

Thirty years ago, after several years of not going to church and holding God at arm's length, I returned to believing in the Lord.

At that time I met a man, a pastor in the Church of the Nazarene, named Terry, who was the same age

as me. Now most Episcopalians don't know many members of the Church of the Nazarene - because they don't drink.

Anyway, Terry had a tremendous enthusiasm for God, that I'd never encountered before, and I remember thinking, "I want to feel that way. I want to be that excited about God too."

We who know our glorious God and have experienced His love and grace should be huge fans of God, as unabashed in our enthusiasm for Him as we are in our enthusiasm for our favorite team, or favorite musicians.

Of course God is actually getting less and less of a fan club, as far as our modern society is concerned.

First prayer was taken out of schools.

Then the Ten Commandments were taken out of Court houses.

Now Valedictorians and School Principals are forbidden to pray at graduation ceremonies.

There is a strong movement to strike the words "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance.

The ACLU, the Anti-Christian legislative union, sues to get prayer banned from Civic meetings across the country.

In the first couple of years after 9/11 many of the survivors spoke about God.

But in the recent round of TV shows for the tenth anniversary, any mention of God had been carefully edited out of people's stories.

Increasingly people frequently use the name of God in the most ungodly ways. Far from God's name being exalted, it is frequently abused.

How would your day have gone if you'd spoken that way when you were a teenager?

Simplistic though this may sound, this lack of respect for God and this failure to acknowledge Him is a big contributing factor to trouble in this life.

We begin our worship services each Sunday with this prayer: "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may

perfectly love you and worthily magnify your Holy name." Then we say / sing
"Glory to God in the Highest."

Are those empty platitudes, or do we really mean it?
Do we want to praise and exalt God with all our heart? Do we want to live our lives so that we really do give glory to God?

Our God is all-loving and all powerful.

Does He console your heartaches?

Does He lift your spirits?

Does He help you through your darkest hours?

A number of years ago when I read about the lives of saints through the ages I thought, as most people

think, "That's wonderful, but I could never be like that."

But actually that's not the case. Any of us could be like that.

There are two things that really distinguish people of great faith. The first is that they really deeply appreciate the magnificence of God.

The second is that they completely trust God.

As modern men and women we readily admire people who are accomplished in areas that interest us. We may even idolize them.

People magazine's best selling annual issue is the 100 most beautiful people. The show 'American Idol' has been enormously successful, and more people

vote for their star pick for the final than turn out for a general election.

While that show may not be everyone's cup of tea, most of us have a famous person from some walk of life that we really admire.

Are the feelings that we have for God stronger than the feelings we have for anyone that we admire? They certainly should be.

An English writer, Sir Oliver Lodge, wrote,

"Surely it cannot be that the instinct that impelled men to build magnificent cathedrals and churches all over Europe was mistaken! There must be some

great truth underlying the instinct for worshipping the Almighty God."

God expects us to worship Him.

He doesn't need it. But He knows we need it.

As St. Augustine was fond of saying,

"God is not made greater if you exalt Him, but you are made greater for it."

The only right basis for relating to God is to exalt Him.

Anything less is disrespectful.

We are either for God or we are against Him.

Worshipping God isn't just the curriculum of the Church.

It is the right focus for all people of the Faith. The more passionately we worship God, the closer we get to Him.

And, the closer we get to God, the more we genuinely want to worship Him.

When you express love you feel more love. Giving Praise is like giving love.

Both people get the benefit.

In the words of the popular spiritual author Evelyn Underhill:

"Adoration is not a difficult religious exercise.

It is an attitude of your soul."

What's important is that our worship of God is authentic, full of meaning, and infused with our inner passion.

Then it is not hard to fall in love with Christ and be totally enraptured with Him. It comes easily to get lost in wonder, love and praise.

Can you say, "I am a huge fan. I am not embarrassed to be a fan of Christ. I will exalt God. I will speak about how wonderful He is.

I will praise His Name and I will live my life so as to give glory to God?"