

**A Homily On the Commemoration of
Blessed Charles C. Grafton
Cathedral Church of St. Paul the Apostle
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, August 30, 2005**

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I graduated from what is now [Parker High School](#) in Janesville, Wisconsin in 1966. And I have used Parker pens almost continuously, every day, since I was in fourth grade, but I have never, ever, even once, felt encouraged by the example, let alone aided by the prayers, or strengthened by the fellowship of [George Safford Parker](#). And if I ever do, I will take two aspirins and lay down for an hour. It is a different matter with Blessed [Charles Grafton](#).

In fact it is a different matter with all the saints. In the prayer-book we read,

‘O God, the King of saints, we praise and glorify your holy Name for all your servants who have finished their course in your faith and fear: for the blessed Virgin Mary; for the holy patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs; and for all your other righteous servants, known to us and unknown; and we pray that, encouraged by their examples, aided by their prayers, and strengthened by their fellowship, we also may be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.’

(The [Book of Common Prayer](#), 1979. p. 504)

Now, here in this diocese, here in this cathedral, it really does not matter if we think that Blessed Charles is praying for us, if he is aiding us with his prayers for us, because he is, along with all the rest of the great cloud of witnesses. (*Hebrews 12:1*) (Actually, of course, our particular location has nothing to do with it either.) And it does not matter if we do not think that he strengthens us with his fellowship because he does along with all the rest of the communion of the saints, along with all the rest of the members of Christ’s body, the Church. The liturgy, the creeds, holy scripture, all remind us that in Christ with we are all united in one body, one Church, and that unity is a fact, not a nice notion, not a pleasant sentiment, but a result of all of us, in this life and the next, having been baptized into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Of course, we are aided by the prayers of Saint Mary, the ever-virgin blessed mother of God, by Blessed Charles, and by all

the saints, known and unknown. Of course, we are strengthened by their fellowship, by their company, by their presence in that same body of Christ.

Now we might have a theology, a set of ideas, a set of notions that ignores all that, or that even contradicts the liturgy, the creeds and the words of the Bible. But that does not change anything. The saints continue to pray for us even if we put our fingers in our ears and hum loudly enough to draw them out. And even if we keep our eyes shut tight, the saints still surround us, their fellowship still strengthens; we are still “treading where the saints have trod.” (*“Onward, Christian Soldiers.” 562. The Hymnal 1983*)

However, when it comes to being encouraged by the example of the saints, we have a little more choice. When it comes to their examples, we need to do some study and leaning. It might involve listening, it might involve reading or it might be as pleasant as studying their lives pictured in glass or icon. The example of the saints encourages us because it is the example of those who have finished their course in [God’s] faith and fear.”

What is Blessed Charles’ example for us? For a few, he is an example of the monastic life, of the vowed life; for a few, he is an example of the priestly and episcopal life. He is an example of a tireless writer, preacher, organizer. He traveled to and fro across the Atlantic and across the divisions of the Church, and around this diocese. Those are details though. All those are incidental to his particular circumstances.

In one of the collects, one of the prayers for the commemoration of Blessed Charles Grafton, we pray, that following blessed Charles’ “example, we may ever live to the extension of your kingdom as faithful witnesses of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.” “Live to the extension of [God’s] kingdom.” This sums up his example very nicely.

Bishop Reginald Weller, wrote the following:

‘GREAT men are wont to crystallize into a sentence the ruling motive, object, and purpose of their lives. The Right Reverend Doctor Grafton had a habit of bidding farewell to the many clergy who called upon him, both from inside and outside his Diocese, not with the formal "Good-bye" or other ordinary expression, but almost universally with "Press on the Kingdom!"’

Bishop Weller went on,

The Kingdom to him was always a very definite thing — the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church — the institution which was in the Eternal Mind when He created the heavens and the earth. Temporal things have only one reason for existence, [Namely] that we might "press on the Kingdom."

("In Memoriam," B. Talbot Rogers, ed. A Journey Godward of a Servant of Jesus Christ. From The Works of the Rt. Rev. Charles C. Grafton Volume 4, New York: Longmans, Green, 1914. p. 310f.)

Blessed Charles' example to us then might well be summed up in "Press on the Kingdom!" The Kingdom of heaven, the Kingdom of God, is God's rule, His reign, His sovereignty, His will. It is for the restoration of all creation to living out God's will that we pray every time we say the Our Father. We might very well say instead of "thy will be done," "Press on the kingdom!"

Now the institutional church and the Kingdom of God are not exactly the same thing at all, (and sometimes the contrast is heartbreaking) but where the Church is faithful to the Gospel, where the Church is an evangelizing Church, where it is proclaiming the Good News, it is the announcement of God's Kingdom,; it is the opening wedge of God's Kingdom, and when we are faithful to the mission of the Church we press on the kingdom. Following the example, encouraged by the example, of Bishop Grafton we too are called to enter in and enjoy the Church filled with life with Jesus at its head Church and the Holy Spirit at its heart. As he wrote

The Church thus comes to men like her [Lord], not merely to offer a future reward, or to save men from the penalty of sin, but to save from sin now by breaking its chains; not to offer merely a future heaven, but so elevating man that he may have a heaven within himself. She comes teaching men that in the unselfish life lies the secret of happiness; how, emancipated from the show and ambitions of the world, to live both strenuously and simply, how to walk contentedly, happily, joyfully, as in the midst of the abiding city with angels and saints about us, and the eternal Light and Life in our hearts.

("Church Principles and Church Parties" B. Talbot Rogers, ed. The Works of the Rt. Rev. Charles C. Grafton (Volume 8), New York: Longmans, Green, 1914, pp. 408ff.)

It is that fundamental understanding of the Church that I believe underlay every other pastoral, and evangelical act of Bishop Grafton, of Blessed Charles. The building of churches, the concern for their beauty, the love of the sacraments, the reaching out to the Church in the East, all flowed from an understanding of the Church as anything but a "human society." It is rather the abiding city. It is that Jerusalem where

[the] saints are crowned with glory great; they see God face to face;
they triumph still, they still rejoice in that most happy place.

There David stands with harp in hand as master of the choir:
ten thousand times would one be blest who might this music hear.

Our Lady sings Magnificat with tune surpassing sweet,
and blessed martyrs harmony doth ring in every street.

(“Jerusalem, My Happy Home.” 620. The Hymnal 1983)

It is “the abiding city with angels and saints about us,” not off in another realm, not off in a yet to be time, but a city where we walk daily, where we walk now. It is the city into which we are lifted every time we gather around the Lord’s Table, the city of Lamb’s high, eternal, ever on-going feast.

If we, in our parishes and our diocese, turn, in despair or in pride, from that understanding, if we allow itching ears (*2 Timothy 4:3*) to only listen an understanding of the Church which is stunted and limited to the fashion of the moment, we will waste what another collect for today has called “the majesty of truth and beauty which we have inherited from” blessed Charles. (*Collect for Commemoration of Charles Grafton, The [Order of Julian of Norwich](#)*)

Pray God that we might rather, "Press on the Kingdom!" And let us do so , in the words of blessed Charles, “contentedly, happily, joyfully, as in the midst of the abiding city with angels and saints about us, and the eternal Light and Life in our hearts.”