

Many, if not most, people know that St. Christopher is the patron saint of travel. And, I would like to begin by welcoming any travelers visiting with us today, and ask that we all keep in prayer the many people from our Church who are also traveling.

As St. Christopher's Church members probably recall, St. Christopher was demoted "a bit" in the 1960s, so there is no actual feast day for him either in the Church calendar. We celebrate his former feast day of July 25th, or we celebrate on a Sunday close to that day.

Since there is no "official" Feast Day for St. Christopher anymore, there are no particular Scripture readings either. So, we typically use the regular scripture for the Sunday (this year this is the 11th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C).

You might have noticed that that our Old Testament reading, in Ecclesiastes, is a pretty pessimistic scripture. I don't find it quite as pessimistic in French, and I have been told that it is not particularly pessimistic in Korean, either, but there's no getting around it that Qoheleth, the author of Ecclesiastes, was pretty darned depressed. Our introduction states that Qoheleth reflects on the useless character of life. Sort of a downer.

The Epistle is a bit better, once it gets past the malice and slander references. Its message is that there is no longer Greek nor Jew, Barbarian or Scythian, slave or free. Christ is all and is in all. And, as we were reminded by those at last week's Democratic Convention, we are a diverse America as well. Indeed, a Muslim American can serve in our armed forces and give his life for our country, and we can and should be proud of him and honor him.

The Gospel lesson reminds me that the Bible is often misquoted. For instance, it is not money that is the root of all evil, but rather it is the love of money that is a root of all kinds of evil. We have these words today: "Eat, drink, and be merry..." You can probably finish that line with me, right? **For tomorrow we will die.**

Only, that's not the Bible's message. The message in this Biblical passage has to do with greed, and about being rich in possessions but poor in spirit. And, so, I come round once again to St. Christopher. I am almost certain that St. Christopher was not rich in possessions, and just as certain that his spirit was rich beyond all measure. I say this in part because I become more and more convinced each year that St. Christopher was indeed a real person.

You may recall that St. Christopher made his way across a raging river, with the Christ child on his shoulders. Or so they say. If some kid hadn't made up that story in creative writing class at monastery school in the 13th Century, we would probably still be celebrating the Feast Day of St. Christopher. But, of course, following Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church decided that this story was more legend than truth and so poor St. Christopher fell on hard times, demoted, with his name no longer being picked for new church start-ups. But, his story is true, just as is the rich man's story in our Gospel parable today, and just as the story of the Good Samaritan is true (although look carefully and know that the Good Samaritan's story was simply that – a story told by Jesus).

There does seem to have been a man called (after his death) Christophoros. He died as a Christian martyr in the late 3rd or early 4th Century. This man is said to have been from what is today known as Libya. When the Romans overran this area, this man was forced to join the Roman army, and he became a personal officer to Emperor Diocletian. Diocletian was one of the worst persecutors of Christians who ever lived. It is said that the man who came to be known

as Christophoros witnessed St. George being martyred as a Christian, and that afterward he too proclaimed his Christian faith and was martyred.

Some scholars, including historian David Woods, believe the man we call St. Christopher may have been the Egyptian martyr St. Menas. Both are described as members of the military unit of Marmantae, an area between Libya and Egypt. Both are said to have been martyred in Antioch, where followers of Christ were first known as “Christians.”

It is said that because St. Menas was not known in the area where he was martyred, that the people referred to him as “Christophoros” – that is, “Christ bearer.”

I’ve learned in the past few years that cars are often blessed on the Feast Day of St. Christopher at many churches bearing his name. I’ve also taken to blessing boats, skateboards, surfboards, bicycles, wheelchairs, and anything else you use as a mode of transportation to get to Church.

So, we can have a lot of fun with St. Christopher and the myths surrounding him. But, let’s not forget the truth at the heart of the legend. St. Christopher is said to have wanted to serve the greatest king around. And it was a hermit, by the river, who is said to have opened his eyes to see Christ as his Lord and King. It is said also that it was the hermit who looked at St. Christopher’s particular gifts of height and strength, and suggested that Christopher serve Christ by helping to carry people across a dangerous river. It was in serving in this way that St. Christopher came to be remembered as the one who carried the Christ child across that river.

Some, or all, of that story is almost certainly a legend. But, we at St. Christopher are called in a particular and unique way to make that story more than legend. We are called to live into that story, and to make it true. You see, WE are St. Christopher. We are and will always be the ones called to use our unique gifts to bear Christ to our community and to the world. Amen.