

Irascible disposition...proud...extravagant...controversial...candid...never ambitious for churchly honors...champion of orthodoxy.... indefatigable worker...stylist of rare gifts...seldom pleasant...never dull...

When I first read these words I thought I was reading a description of vergers. In actuality, this is how Saint Jerome, whose Feast we celebrate today, is described in various biographical writings¹ about him.

Of course, I am kidding when I associate these words to describe one of the great Doctors of the Church with the unsung heroism of our beloved vergers. I did discover a few similarities though between Jerome, priest and monk of Bethlehem and those who minister in the church as vergers.

I learned especially how Jerome, like vergers, preferred to work inconspicuously, ultimately taking-on the life of a monk and asceticism. Like vergers, Jerome took his responsibility seriously. He has been credited with writing the first acknowledged scholarly translation of the Hebrew and Greek texts in the Bible into Latin. He accepted this task as a way for ensuring that the common people of society were better able to understand and appreciate the experience of worshipping G_D. Indeed his translation of Scripture into Latin was referred to as the Vulgate – in recognition that the language used was not that of the classic Hebrew or Greek but rather the language of everyday people---the “vulgar language.” We are to be grateful to Jerome for paving a way for the creation of the Spanish, French, Italian and English we commonly use today.

Paul, in his Second Letter to Timothy, underscores the importance of studying and understanding the sacred texts to which we have been exposed since childhood. Paul knew scripture to contain all things necessary “for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.”² Like the apostle Paul, Jerome understood the necessity to interpret the

¹ Sources consulted include *Holy Women, Holy Men*, <http://www.missionstclare.com/english/people/sep30.html> (James Kiefer) and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerome>

² 2 Timothy 3:15 NRSV

inspired word of G_D so that all who believe in Jesus Christ will come to know his marvelous works through the love of G_D and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We clergy can sometimes get caught...trapped really...by erudition as a result of the intensive scholastic training we have received from the academic institutions that exists to prepare us for the work in which we are engaged. You know, like using words such as “erudition” in our sermons. Sometimes, we need someone like Jerome to help us translate our language into words “so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”³ You as vergers offer a bridge between what at times can be our indecipherable language to those who show-up at G_D’s house to worship. You engage the timid, first time lector or intercessor to give them confidence in the power of the words they will read in praise, thanksgiving and petition to G_D. You provide gentle but firm instruction to the young acolyte whose attention is easily diverted and help her understand how her distractions can interfere with the worship experience of others.

These and many other simple but significant duties performed by vergers help us, lay and ordained alike, to “do the work of an evangelist”⁴ as Paul encouraged Timothy and as Jerome did for Christians in the fourth century. May our minds, through the grace of G_D, the love of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit be opened to understanding and helping others to understand the mysteries to which we are witnesses. Amen.

³ 2 Timothy 3:17, NRSV

⁴ 2 Timothy, 4:5, NRSV