

Evensong July 22, 2012

A brief reflection on the text of the anthem sung this evening: a text written by the so-called metaphysical poet John Donne. These were seventeenth century poets that included George Herbert, Anne Bradstreet, Richard Crashaw, Thomas Traherne among others....but Donne was considered the master....the Metaphysical poets were so named because their poetry dealt with matters beyond mere physical reality...they looked to the eternal found in the high metaphors of the common things of earth...very similar to the Romantic poets who would come a century later. Donne, as were many of his colleagues was a neo-Platonist. If you know anything of Plato you know that Plato and his philosophical school believed that all of the forms of earth were symbols, reflections of the eternal forms of heaven. (Much like the sacraments of the church, much like the figure of Jesus representing God in earth....X'anity owes much to Platonic thought)

But much like the Romantic poets after them these poets believed that the forms of earth quite literally were not just symbols but Incarnational reality....that the lines between eternity and time are blurred...that the infinite participates in the finite...that truly there is only one mystical reality, a unifying beauty that, shall we say, joins heaven and earth....sorry y'all, I'm an English major...and I just have to let go every now and then.

I googled the poem and the first site that came up was a list of prayers for the dead...and this was among them....but I want to say that this is a prayer a hymn, first and foremost for the living (the metaphysical poets were much more concerned with life in the present, not some otherworldly fantasy land)....they are speaking of heaven in earth, eternal life, a life of beauty that is shared among us here and now, in our very midst.

The last awakening is no last awakening at all, but merely the next experience of the beauty that pervades this world, the last become the first....beauty that brings rhythm, grace and balance and harmony into the sacred space we call life. Donne is describing life's very procession from one experience of beauty to the next...beauty that transforms...beauty that saves....and one can't have a procession without music...can one? It is music that moves us from awakening to awakening....as I've said to you before, Dante knew this centuries ago....that it is music that moves the spheres of heaven, and therefore in the spirit of Donne and Herbert and many others who would but see the truth, it is what moves life in earth as well...so let us be about the grand procession...the grand procession from beauty to beauty...and let it be a song in glorious praise of our God that moves us so very gently and so very joyfully and so very surely along.