

Homily for William Reed Huntington, Priest, July 26, 1471
July 27, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Galatians 3:23–29; Psalm 146:4–9; Matthew 25:31–40

Some years ago, I was invited to speak at Trinity-by-the-Cove Church in Naples, Florida, on the history of the four American Prayer Books. I already had commentaries on the 1928 book and the 1979 book. I bought copies of Marion Hatchett's *The Making of the First American Book of Common Prayer*¹ and Lesley Northup's *The 1892 Book of Common Prayer*.² I knew the name of William Reed Huntington that he had been rector of Grace Church, Broadway, here in the city. Building on the work of another rector in New York, William Augustus Muhlenberg. William Muhlenberg was the founding rector of the Church of the Holy Communion. He died in 1877.

I also knew that it was Huntington who formulated *The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral*, adapted by the General Convention in 1886 and adapted in 1888 by the third Lambeth Conference. You can find these

¹ Marion J. Hatchett, *The Making of the First American Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982).

² Lesley Armstrong Northup, *The 1892 Book of Common Prayer* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993).

resolutions in the back of our Prayer Book in the Historical Documents section.³

Huntington published his ideas first in 1870, while rector of All Saints' Church, Worcester, Massachusetts, in a book called *The Church-idea: An Essay Towards Unity*.⁴ One can download and read it online.⁵

He wrote, “The true Anglican position, like the City of God in the [Revelation to John], may be said to lie foursquare. Honestly to accept that position is to accept, —

- 1st. The Holy Scriptures as the Word of God.
- 2nd. The Primitive Creeds as the Rule of Faith.
- 3rd. The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself.
- 4th. The Episcopate as the key-stone of [Church] Unity.

In 1880, at the age of 42, as a delegate to the General Convention, he offered the resolution that would lead

³ *The Book of Common Prayer* [1979], 876–78.

⁴ William Reed Huntington, *The Church-idea: An Essay Towards Unity* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1870).

⁵ <https://archive.org/details/churchideaaness02huntgoog>, (accessed 27 July 2020).

in 1892 to the second American Prayer Book and set the stage for the next two.⁶

Some of you knew Mike Merenda, Leroy Sharer's spouse, who died ten days ago on July 17. When learning of Mike's death, a former colleague whom he had hired as a junior attorney, wrote to Leroy what it was like to work for Mike. It reminded me of how Mike took me under his wing as a new rector in New York City. His colleague wrote, "The first year under Mike's tutelage saw me often in his office, standing behind him while he crafted emails and memos and reports and taught me to be nuanced, to think beyond the words on a page or from someone's mouth, and to always find ways to bring people together . . . he always found a kind way to blunt negative words." These words reminded me of what one reads about Huntington in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*:

[He] provided a leadership characterized by breadth, generosity, scholarship, and boldness . . . His reconciling spirit helped preserve the unity of the Episcopal Church in the painful days after the

⁶ Hatchett, 588.

*beginning of the schism . . . which resulted in the formation of the Reformed Episcopal Church.*⁷

You can read about the Reformed Episcopal Church online.⁸

The Reverend Dr. Huntington became rector of Grace Church in 1883. He was still rector when he died on July 26, 1909. He was instrumental in founding our cathedral. We commemorate him today because the traditional commemoration for July 26 is for the Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I want to think that our spirit of welcome here at Saint Mary's has been shaped in part by the character of the men and women of the diocese of New York who have gone before us.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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⁷ *Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2006* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2006), 322.

⁸ <http://www.rechurch.org/>, (accessed 27 July 2020).