
The Blessing Dean

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Rev. George M. Maxwell Jr., Vicar**

I remember the moment. I was just two miles from the start-all downhill so far. It was a beautiful day. I was full of energy. And, so was everyone around me.

I saw him standing on the sidewalk. White shorts, black shirt, white collar, and an unrelenting smile. He was holding a silver bowl and sprinkling water over the runners now streaming down the street. The current seemed to move to his side of the street, as if that's where the channel was the deepest.

As I got closer, I could hear him offering blessings to the runners. "Blessings! Blessings to you! Blessings to you, , and you, , and you!" Each blessing seemed to draw an immediate response. Smiles brightened. People shouted back. "Thank you. Blessings to you!" And, my favorite, "Hey Father, over here!" Our pace picked up a little after that.

Dean Candler is now known as the "Blessing Dean" to many of us. He says he's blessing "perseverance and endurance, , training and exercise and good health," and "fun and frolic." He says he's blessing "the life and liberty that come to us through the celebration of Independence Day."

But, he's doing more than just that. He's also reminding us of how our tradition equips us to engage the world. He's showing us how we can meaningfully engage others simply by showing them what it means to us to be Christian.

I'm told that it all started in 1999, when July 4 fell on a Sunday. Organizers scheduled the Peachtree Road Race for its usual early start, which made morning services almost impossible for churches along the route. Some protested what they saw as the secular invading the sacred. The Cathedral did not.

Instead, the Dean brought the sacred out to meet the secular. He moved the Cathedral service to the street, blessing the runners as they came by and celebrating the Eucharist on the lawn after the race was over.

By sprinkling holy water over the runners, the Dean is offering them the grace held by an ancient symbol of life. Remember these words from our baptism liturgy? "We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life."

By blessing the runners, the Dean is offering them the grace of seeing with the eyes of faith. Blessing them doesn't make them holy, of course. They are already holy because God created them. Blessing them is meant to remind us all that we are holy, and to help us all experience the extraordinary love of God that greets us in the ordinary events of our lives.

I remember finishing the race that year to the enthusiastic voice of a volunteer who yelled repeatedly over her megaphone- "Congratulations! You are all winners. Everybody's a winner!"

I don't remember my time that year. I don't remember if I started too fast or finished too slow. But, I do remember the

bulldog running next to the yellow jacket. I do remember the runners I was with as we climbed Heartbreak Hill. And, I do remember the first person I saw after I crossed the finish line.

We were all winners. But, we were not all winners because we had finished the race. We were all winners, as the Dean reminded us, because we are blessed.

And, for that, thanks be to God!

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