
Beauty and Truth, Prayer and Pain

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

When I played guitar more often, I made sure to include the spirituals and ballads that Joan Baez sang. Obviously, her voice outshone mine, like the sun compares to mud, but I pressed on. Something about her beautiful voice, and something about the truth she sang, made me want to be beautiful and true, too.

Actually, it was like that during the recent Olympics. When I watched those incredible athletes, whatever the event, I actually wanted to sing better. I would turn off the television, and move over to the piano, and try to sing just as beautifully as those athletes had run and jumped and swam and dived and twisted in the air. It doesn't matter whether I succeeded or not. It was enough that I had a taste of trying to participate in beauty.

One evening, when I was about twenty years old, I was singing one of the most beautiful and moving of the old Joan Baez songs, "All My Trials," still one of my favorites. It was a Saturday night, where I grew up, and lots of people were in the living room, old friends and new. Some strangers. Those were the days. And we were singing, like we usually did.

*"Hush little baby, don't you cry,
You know your mother was born to die.
All my trials, Lord, soon be over.
Too late my brothers, too late
But never mind
All my trials, Lord, soon be over."*

As soon as I had sung those lines, "you know your mother was born to die," I glanced over to the edge of the room. There sat one of my early friends, who I had not seen in years, who had somehow showed up that night. Tragically enough, his divorced mother had been shot dead by her new boyfriend about three months previously.

I was shocked. The synchronicity of the words I was singing, and the view of my old childhood friend, completely pained me.

So proceeds the power of beauty and truth, no matter what kind it is. Like the old saying, "Bidden or unbidden, God is here" (attributed to Carl Jung, who inscribed it over his doorway, but Jung was quoting Erasmus). So it is with music: "bidden or unbidden, music speaks the truth."

But be careful if you want to be beautiful. Be careful if you want to sing. Be careful if you want to pray. You will speak truth. It will be painful to some, and to you, too.

The Cathedral Parish of St. Philip sang beautifully last Sunday, even as we were remembering the pain of September 11, 2001. We were singing ancient hymns and old poetry of George Herbert set to modern music. It doesn't matter what the age is, or what the music is. God speaks beauty and truth through our songs, and through our prayers.



© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*