
Remembering Philip the Deacon Again: Grace, Excellence, and Hospitality!

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

For many years now, I have reminded us of what it means for our cathedral parish to be named after Philip the Deacon, and not Philip the Apostle! For some years, there was some ambiguity about the distinction, and some ambiguity about which saint we were named for. It may well have been that our cathedral ancestors thought they were the same person, as many Christians once did.

Without going into that history again, I want to joyfully remember our patron saint as Philip the Deacon, whose diaconal vestment adorns our historic parish carvings and ornaments, and whose windows celebrating the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch are all over our history and our building.

Since we will be observing the Feast Day of Philip the Deacon this Sunday (transferred from October 11), it is good to pause and remember our cathedral identity as that of a servant, a deacon! Here, then, are some of the ways I talked about it in a [sermon of October 12, 2014](#):

This cathedral in Atlanta, Georgia, honors Philip as our patron saint, not least because Philip is a deacon. The world tends to think of cathedrals as grand and imposing structures, worthy of awe and prestige. And from the outside, this church, here on a grand site looking down Peachtree Road, looks imposing. We look imposing to the ordinary driver in Atlanta. We look grand and prestigious.

But we at the Cathedral of St. Philip have worked against the notion of being grand and imposing. It is not the way of Jesus Christ to be imposing.

Much of the world, and even much of the church, want our institutions to be imposing. We want to be part of a system that always gets it right. We want to be part of a system to whom we can appeal our grievances and slights, and who will impose their right way upon the world.

And cathedrals have certainly fit that description in the past. And, surely, churches have certainly been institutions that we can rely on.

But cathedrals and churches have also succumbed to damaging perceptions, too, from age to age. Whenever we have tried to be imperialistic, we have failed the gospel. ... The Bible is against empire. ... Certainly cathedrals have been perceived as structures or systems that can act imperiously. Indeed, some people desire for cathedrals to act imperiously, with all-or-nothing absolutism.

But that is decidedly not the mission of the Cathedral of St. Philip. Even when people project grandeur and imposition upon us, when they want us to be grand and imposing, that is not our way.

This week, we celebrate the character of our patron saint, Philip, as a deacon, called to serve. We are a cathedral named for a

deacon. Named not for an emperor, not for a king, not for a president, not for a CEO. Named for a deacon. Deacons are servants.

The apostles of Jesus, apparently, occasionally succumbed to false perceptions of greatness. Apparently, a dispute arose among them one day as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. "So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant" (Luke 22:24 and Mark 10:42-43).

I wish that gospel selection was the one assigned for the Feast of St. Philip! The greatest among you is the one who serves, not the one who is the emperor.

When I talk about our ministry here at the Cathedral of St. Philip, I talk about service with three words, three words that I use a lot. Those words are grace, excellence, and hospitality. ... Of course, the values of grace and excellence and hospitality can mean different things to people, and that is fine. But, for me, the meanings are these: Grace is simply the elegant love of God; it is the love of God expressed in as simple and beautiful and economical a way as possible. Excellence is the desire to do things well, according to whatever the standard of the event or project is. Hospitality is respect; hospitality is welcoming everyone, including everyone, dignifying everyone, especially the stranger, especially the Ethiopian eunuch. Hospitality is serving others more than oneself.

Happy St. Philip's Day to you! May the servanthood of grace, excellence, and hospitality be with all of us!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip