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## *For Austin Ford: Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness*

### **At the funeral for the Reverend Austin Ford**

Oh, how this world misses Austin Ford. We miss what he stood for. We miss his witness. His combination of amazing sensitivity and wisdom and direct ministry was unmatched in this church. And it is a special honor to hold his funeral here at the Cathedral of St. Philip, for this is the place where he picketed the Diocese of Atlanta back in the 60s, with good reason!

He did not always connect with religious institutions like diocesan structures and policies; but he sure connected with the people of God, the true Church. His witness for social justice, and for the equal rights of poor people, and of all people, was disarming in its sincerity and love.

But he was also much, much, more than a social activist.

He knew stories. He knew this city and its history like no one else. He knew Atlanta's people, all of them. He knew me, for instance, and parts of me, that I did not even know myself.

Like many an eager priest in Atlanta, I spent considerable time at Emmaus House. I worked in the Poverty Rights Office, years ago. Well, Austin would tell me stories about long theological conversation he had had with my own grandmother, and her rather heretical notions, before she left the church. It was he who told me how my own aunt and uncle, who were quite religiously devout, had transferred from St. Luke's Church, in order to follow him when he started St. Bartholomew's Church, especially to be near and to serve the Emory community. It was later, of course, that he moved to Emmaus House.

He knew all of you, too! Every single one of you! Austin knew stories of old Decatur, and who lived next to whom, and who was related to whom. He knew the people of God. He knew the saints of God, all of them.

Many of you remember your amazement when you first entered the holy sanctuary of his upstairs lodgings at Emmaus House. As we all know, it was full of silver and antiques. That place glittered and glowed like a vision from the Book of Revelation. "In that house were many mansions" – Emmaus House, where holy pilgrims had our eyes opened and recognized Jesus.

"Beauty belongs here," Austin would say, over and over. Beauty did belong wherever Austin was. And, let me tell you: Beauty was attracted to Austin! And beauty was attracted to Emmaus House. Ethel May Matthews, and opera, and Frances Pauley, and Muriel Lokey, and Margaret Mead, and roses, and statues, and art, and gifts.

Being with Austin was like being in the kingdom of heaven. It is Austin Ford who teaches the church to "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness means things like: Dancing the gospel procession all around Emmaus House chapel, in all its incarnations, all the various rooms and buildings where the chapel has been, while singing "This Little Light of Mine," and swinging incense like we were in a medieval cathedral. Austin knew the power of prayer, and the power of beautiful liturgy prayed on behalf of the poor, and the people of God.

Being with Austin was being with beauty. He showed us something of the kingdom of God. He was a gift to us from the Book of Revelation, where incense and glory surround the saints, especially the saints who suffer in tribulation.

Today, we all know that Austin continues to live in that beauty and in that heaven. But we pray that he continues to live here, too, with the poor and with all the people of god. We remember Austin today with all those saints, the saints of God who show beauty in the world, who are beauty in the world. Who have touched us, all of us, with the love of God. That is resurrection. This is eternal life.

AMEN.

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

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