

“TYPUS ORBIS TERRARUM” THE WORLD BEFORE GPS

Very early in life, I developed a fascination with maps. I seemingly studied them endlessly on our drives to Cape Cod, MA in our Oldsmobile Vista Cruiser Station Wagon, (complete with “wood” paneling and sun roof), or later when plotting out a trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. When I discovered in the seminary that there was an ecclesiastical atlas that mapped out all the dioceses of the world, I was utterly beside myself with glee. In particular, geographical oddities fascinated me. For example, we are all familiar with the “bump” in the northernmost part of Minnesota at the Lake of the Woods, but most are ignorant of how that anomaly occurred. Early on before precise maps existed, it was thought that the **Mississippi River** intersected with the **Lake of the Woods**. They did not know about Lake Itasca. As a result, the **1783 Treaty of Paris** stated that the boundary between U.S. territory and the British possessions to the north would run “...through the Lake of the Woods to the northwestern-most point thereof, and from thence (gotta love that word ‘thence’!) on a due west course to the river Mississippi...”

Oops– the problem is of course that the two bodies of water do not intersect at any point. It would be like saying, “I’ll meet you at the corner of Summit and University Ave.” Part of the confusion was that the best existing map of the time (the 1755 A.D. Mitchell Map- see photo in side bar) had an **insert in the upper left-hand corner** of the map, obscuring the supposed intersection of the two bodies of water. So, while it may have appeared that they would meet somewhere up in the northwest part of the territory of Minnesota, due to a cartographer’s error, we ended up with a huge problem. The only way to solve it was to correct the error, which happened in a subsequent Anglo-American Convention of 1818 by having the boundary continue due south from the northwest point of the lake, but then only to the 49th parallel and then westward from there. But that means that some of that land to the east of the North-South line from the corner of the Lake passes through what by any reasonable measure ought to be Canadian land. It is that 49th parallel that most people think of when seeing the western border between our two countries.

Maps have played a significant role in the life of the Church and society. A humble Flemish man (Catholic, but that is disputed) who never married, **Abraham Ortelius** produced the first world atlas in 1570 A.D. with his iconic map of the world entitled *Typus Orbis Terrarum* (“an image of the entire earth”). No trace is to be found of the Mississippi River in this first world map, even though despite Hernando de Soto’s discovery of the Mississippi River at a point below what is now Natchez, Mississippi. Centuries before that, the monk and statesman **Cassiodorus** (c. 480-c. 575 A.D., he of the Penitential Psalms fame) once gave some sage advice concerning maps. In addressing monks, he encouraged them to read the second century Greek geographer and astronomer Ptolemy. I suspect he had that work in his own vast library that he had established. In his work entitled (*Institutiones* I, 25.2), he writes: “Then, if a noble concern for knowledge has you set on fire, you have the work of Ptolemy, who has described all places so clearly that you judge him to have been practically a resident of all regions, and as a result you, who are located in one spot, as is seemly for monks, traverse in your minds that which the travel of others has assembled with very great labor.”

Cassiodorus entreated them to visit places vicariously by means of maps. He also encouraged the contemplation of maps when reading and studying the Bible, another very good piece of advice, especially if you are reading the Acts of the Apostles and visualizing Paul’s Missionary journeys. Today, centuries later, one can go on **Google Earth** and see a smorgasbord of images from countries all around the world, including remote places few could ever hope to see in person. What is available by means of modern technology is truly amazing. Don’t want to take the trouble or time to hike 70 miles to and from **Mount Everest Base Camp**? Not to worry. Through the wonders of **Google Street View**, you can see the exact spot where trekkers all have their pictures taken upon arrival at Base Camp. Of course, the day I arrived in March of 2017 was sunny and clear, not at all the dreary day captured by the folks from Google. God’s creation is filled with many wonders and we humans have established some very unique (even strange) borders. Mapmakers have for centuries tried to combine their passion for exploration with a penchant for accuracy and we are the beneficiaries of their labors.

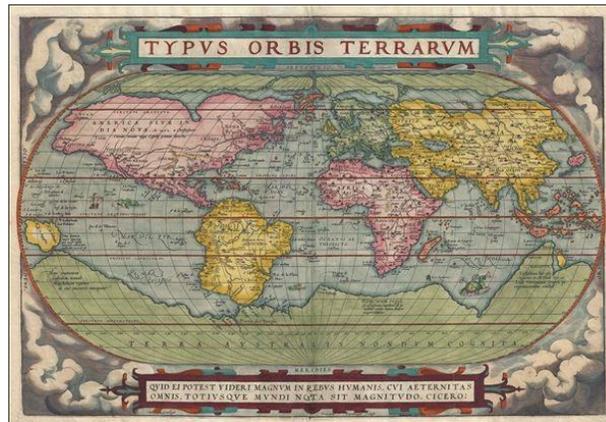
- It is not too early to start thinking about getting more involved beginning this September. I wish to ask you to prayerfully consider joining our all-volunteer **Cathedral Choir** that provides such beautiful music for our 10:00 a.m. Mass. You need not be a pro to join the choir– when we raise our voices to God, the Lord is glorified. It is a beautiful way to give back to our parish.
- We are delighted to welcome Good Shepherd **Sister Rose Hang Vu** as our missionary speaker at all the Masses **this weekend**. Our special collection after Communion is in support of initiatives in

Vietnam that educate orphans, disabled children and unwed mothers who wish to keep their newborns. Sr. Rose's congregation helps those under poverty address issues of malnutrition, lack of basic healthcare, and access to safe water.

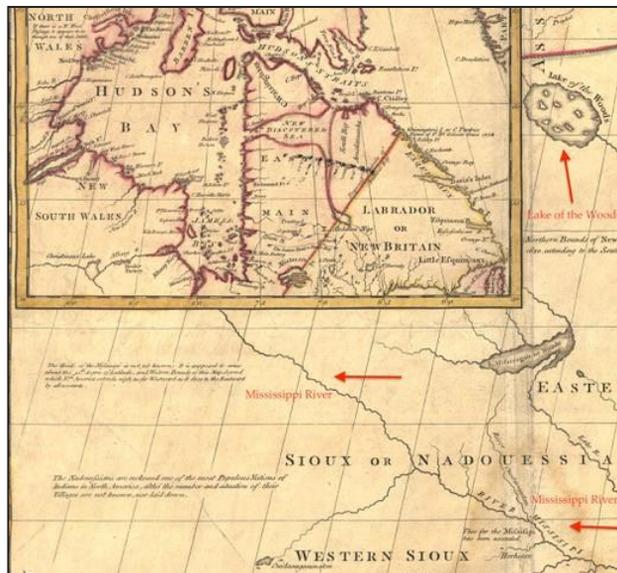
- Fire sale anyone? As the Major League Baseball trade deadline approaches, I fear that the Twins may well unload some talent in hopes of acquiring minor league prospects. This would mean essentially giving up on this year and looking to the future. I am running out of futures— I want to win now!
- Missed the views of the cities from the **Highland Water Tower** last weekend? Mark your calendars for October 13-14 when it will be open for the fall colors. The 127-foot-tall, 90-year-old tower at the corner of Snelling Avenue and Ford Parkway once held 200,000 gallons of water but was decommissioned recently. On the National Register of Historic Places and the work of Clarence Wigington, the first African- American municipal architect in the country, it provides some of the most commanding views of the cities from its observation deck. It sits at 1009 feet of elevation, and then add 151 stairs— well, you get the picture.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector



THE MITCHELL MAP - 1775 UTILIZED AT TREATY OF PARIS FOR UNITED STATES BOUNDARIES



Notice the insert in the upper left-hand corner creating the false impression of the intersection between the Mississippi River and Lake of the Woods. (red arrows and text added)