

CHRISM EUCHARIST
APRIL 7TH 2009

Readings: Isaiah 61: 1-6a
2 Timothy 1: 6-14
Matthew 10: 1 & 5-11.

‘Join with me in suffering for the Gospel’ 2 Timothy 1: 8b)

Having chosen the theme and the readings for this service, I followed my usual practice of allowing them to linger in the mind and on the heart before settling down to try and make something more of them by way of an address.

Having allowed them to linger and being ready to settle at the computer to start typing, I opted to delay just a little further and type the word BISHOP into Google to see how that vast engine of knowledge perceived the term. (I had, incidentally, already asked a member of the family how they might explain it. Among the repeatable responses emerged the old nugget: ‘A bishop moves diagonally on a chess board!’)

To return to Google. The result was really quite interesting and I thought that I might, by way of beginning this address, share with you some details.

There were two entries from ‘The Food Lover’s Companion’:

First this: The classic ‘bishop’, dating back to the 18th century, is a mulled red wine, simmered with a roasted clove-studded orange and served hot. Conjecture suggests the name comes from the rich colour of a bishop’s robes. (That the bishop is best served having been kept simmering, is an intriguing image!)

Then secondly the Food Lover’s Companion states that: Today, the name ‘bishop’ is also given to a cocktail that combines red wine with lemon juice, orange juice, powdered sugar and cloves; it’s served in a tall glass over ice and garnished with slices of orange and lemon. (That the bishop might be a cocktail in which are combined sweet and sour is, of course, yet another intriguing image!)

Thirdly, and now perhaps a little more helpfully for our purposes, there came a more traditional offering from the ‘Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia’ defining the ecclesiastical role of the

Bishop in a task-specific way which all of us would probably recognise: overseeing, exercising authority and discipline, ordaining, confirming and so on, and, in some cases largely drawn from history, detailing the exercise a certain amount of secular political power.

What, however, was missing from the Britannica definition, was any notion of working **with** anyone; any notion of enabling. There was nothing about being, a lot about doing – as I described it ‘task-specific’. There was nothing of what my text calls ‘joining with me in suffering for the gospel.’

Now I won’t enter into the debate about whether or not Paul himself, Paul’s secretary, a group of Paul’s disciples or whoever else wrote what have come to be known as the Pastoral Letters (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus). It will get us nowhere for the purposes of today. For convenience, at least, I will, when necessary, refer to the author as ‘Paul’.

From early days, although there may have been various levels of responsibility within the Christian community, there has always underpinned each and every level one common denominator,

what Paul refers to as ‘a holy calling’; the calling which springs from our one baptism into Christ and our subsequent life in Christ - ‘*en christo*’. It is within the context of that holy calling that we are each to share in suffering for the Gospel regardless of office or order.

The rites for the ordinations of Bishops, or Priests or Deacons, whilst making it clear that the candidates are being set apart to fulfil a particular office within the Church, nevertheless, in the examination of those candidates, make it very clear that these individuals, so set apart, are set apart within the whole church, rather than set apart to flutter around it like ecclesiastical moths fluttering around a light bulb. They are to be rooted in the life of the whole Body of Christ or, to use the imagery of the hymns also chosen for today, they are to seek, announce and build up the kingdom of God **for** his people and in common calling **with** his people ‘***Ceisiwch yn gyntaf deyrnas ein Duw.***’ Seek first the Kingdom of our God.

The rite for the ordination of Bishops – and it was a timely reminder to hear these words last Saturday at Llandaff Cathedral

when the Bishop of St Asaph and the Assistant bishop of Llandaff were set apart for their particular task - says:

'Will you work **with God's people** and with the deacons and priests to proclaim the good news?'

Similarly, the rite for the ordination of Priests and Deacons says:

'Will you work **with all God's people** to discern and to develop the mission of the Church?'

The prophet Isaiah, in words very familiar to us, speaks of the anointing or setting apart either of an individual – the servant of the Lord, or of a group of individuals – the community of all God's people, to bring **good news** of the Kingdom to others.

Jesus sends out the twelve to proclaim **good news**, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'

And this commissioning is intended to create not passive recipients of that good news, but to engage and enliven others to become fellow-workers who will share in proclaiming that good news – who will **join in suffering for the Gospel**.

Doing this, of course, is demanding and it can be daunting and difficult.

In the local setting, Parish Share; rules and regulations; debates about change; loss of impetus; blunted vision and more can, from time to time, seem unfair, burdensome and dispiriting. (In mentioning the local context, I make no mention of the eyes of Bishops and Archdeacons, but I'm not naïve enough to think that we can't, just very occasionally, be perceived with just a hint of negativity!)

In the wider setting, the political correctness-gone-mad which seems to demand that we defer in silence or apologise for the Gospel rather than stand up for it; the glib and ill-informed critiques of atheists who have the luxury of being allowed to attack us and the Gospel, and the freedom to blaspheme our Lord and Saviour without any hesitation or sanction. All of this can be so numbingly frustrating.

In both these settings is crystallised the reason for us all, lay-people and ordained ministers – brothers and sisters with a shared holy calling - to heed Paul's words to Timothy, and to be

reminded, each one of us, regularly to rekindle the gift of God that is within us; to not only guard that gift but also to reflect upon it and upon the kingdom-creating proclamation which is the very purpose for which the gift has come our way. In short, to remember why we are here – here now and in our parishes and in our daily lives. To remember what we are about. To see the burdens in terms of suffering with others for the Gospel and to affirm that it's something worth doing. Humanity needs the Gospel because the Gospel demands meaning and dignity and for humanity.

The 17th century Priest-poet George Herbert in his verse 'The Collar', pictures a dispirited priest. In today's terms, he's lost it. The priest sees his clerical collar as a rope that strangles, restricts and enslaves him.

He has '*no harvest but a thorn*'. He continues

'Sure there was wine

Before my sighs did drie it: there was corn

Before my tears did drown it.'

The priest threatens to rebel against his discipline, huffing and puffing about what he will do. But amidst his discordant ravings there comes a moment of rekindling, and the verse ends on a gentler and more harmonious and affirming note:

But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild

At every word,

Me thought I heard one calling, Child!

And I replied, My Lord.

Rekindling the gift of God that is within us all means being ready and willing, whether we are raving and dispirited, or whether we are less anxious, (and I hope, incidentally that we are more often the latter than the former!) – being ready and willing to listen for the voice of the one who calls us individually '**child**' and whom we call **Our Father**. It means being ready, one with another, Bishops, Priests, Deacons and all the people of God, to be joined in our holy calling of suffering for the Gospel.

I have been your bishop for just about a year. If together we have done nothing more, I pray that we might have begun to remember the need to rekindle the gift which of God which is in us and in

which we share, and that we have begun to affirm afresh that the Gospel is worth suffering for.

So, my friends, have a good Holy Week and a wonderful Easter. Thank you all for what you and your brothers and sisters do in your parishes. Thank you. ***‘Join with me in suffering for the Gospel’***, and please now join with me in affirming that it’s worth carrying on!

AFFIRMATION OF MINISTRY FOLLOWS