

Trinity Sunday 19th June 2011

St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem

The Most Reverend Fred J. Hiltz, Primate of the Episcopal Church of Canada

Most Bishops, Priests, and Pastors I know are glad to have a guest preacher on Trinity Sunday. It's good we say for the people to hear someone else's perspective and reflections on this great mystery at the heart of the faith we share.

I have very pleasant memories of a visit to the Diocese of Jerusalem two years ago. It was my first visit here and I learned from Bishop Suheil that the proclamation of the gospel in its fullness includes ministries of hospitality, housing, healthcare, education and reconciliation. Last year I was delighted to welcome Bishop Suheil and his wife Shafeeqa to the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada. Delegates very much appreciated their testimony to the witness of the Church in the Land of the Holy One and its role in faithfully endeavoring to live the beatitude 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.'

Moved by their presentations, the Synod adopted a resolution calling on the church to make provision for educating, advocating, and praying for peace in the Middle East and, in the interest of strengthening ties with the Church here, we are drawing together a body known as Canadian Companions to the Diocese of Jerusalem.

I am here today however as a member of the Anglican Lutheran International Commission which monitors and seeks to advance dialogue between Anglicans and Lutherans throughout the world. Our task is to provide encouragement and counsel and to open up possibilities of working together in a common witness in the service of the Gospel.

The decision to meet here in Jerusalem was made last year in Stuttgart, Germany where Bishop Munib Younan was elected president of the Lutheran World Federation. To be here with him and Bishop Suheil is an extraordinary privilege by which we believe our work will be richly blessed.

Our task this week is to complete the writing of a report on diakonia – the servant ministry of the whole Church – a ministry intrinsic to the apostolicity of the church as sent by Christ to bear, by word and by deed the good news of God's love, justice, and peace for all people. This report will explore the full expression of diakonia from compassionate service to those in need to the political advocacy that boldly addresses root causes doing many things in its power to bring about change, change that restores, reforms and transforms. Diakonia is informed and inspired by a vision of the world repaired and abiding in the beauty of that 'Shalom' God intends for all. An earlier report on this subject says diakonia is an expression of what the Church believes and confesses – the grace of God in the healing of the world.

To this task members of the Commission come from many missional contexts, Cameroon and Canada, Germany and Japan, Britain and Botswana, Ireland and Australia, Latin America and the United States of America. In our work we are well served by staff from the offices of the Anglican Communion and the Lutheran World Federation. We are humbled to be here in Jerusalem – the mother of us all.

We are here in this holy city where Jesus, the Son of God, gave in this meal of bread and wine a new commandment to love one another. Here in this city where Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. Here in this city where he rose from the dead and appeared to many of his followers. Here in this city where the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples so that with conviction and courage they might become his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Here in this city where the first great council of the church was held –

a gathering that would define the Church as inclusive of all who put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We come mindful that it was in this holy city that Jesus prayed that we all may be one as he and the father are one that by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, we may be drawn deeper and deeper into the mystery of divine love. We come mindful that this is the eternal prayer of Jesus for his Church in every place.

As often as we celebrate the Eucharist we join in his prayer:

*‘O may we all one bread, one body be
Through this blessed sacrament of unity’*

We pray for that love and grace in which Christ would his church abide – not for the sake of itself alone but for the sake of the world.

All our labors, all our dialogues bilateral and multilateral all our synods and counsels and assemblies, all our agreed statements and all our celebrations of the Eucharist set in a yet greater and glorious context.

The hymn writer puts it this way:

*‘So Lord, at length when sacraments shall cease
May we be one with all thy Church above
One with thy saints in one unbroken peace
One with thy saints in one unbounded love
More blessed still in peace and love to be
One with the trinity in unity’*

Beautiful words for the Eucharist on Trinity Sunday.

Throughout the Church there is a call for the Athanasian Creed on this Sunday:

‘Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith; Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.’

So begins the full forty-two verse text of this ancient Creed of the Church. The Canadian Stephen Reynolds by way of reflection on that text says:

‘God remains sovereign in mystery as in mercy. Mystery is an invitation to ceaseless exploration, not a permission slip for ignorance and even as we acknowledge that we shall never ever know all there is about God, we also confess that God has given us not only enough to start with but also plenty enough to keep us supplied on our journey onward and into the divine life.’

Reynolds reminds us that pondering on the mystery of the Blessed trinity is to think about harmony, inter-relationships, inter-dependence, and mutual love. ‘Imagine,’ he writes, ‘imagine a pattern of relationships in which each partner not only shares all that he or she has with the others, but also lives into the others,

to establish each of the others in their fullness. Now that is not just a pattern of relationships: that's Communion – a communion of life mutually shared where diversity is not swallowed up but truly fulfilled in unity.'

It is that very kind of unity of which the Eucharist is a beautiful fore-taste, that kind of unity of which the Archbishop of Canterbury speaks, not a quantitative unity but a qualitative unity in which we are diminished by the power of another and enriched by the holiness of another.

In her book 'The Celtic Way of Prayer' Esther de Waal devotes one chapter to the Trinity. She writes 'When as a child I was asked what my favorite hymn was, I would tell everyone 'Immortal, Invisible, God only Wise; In light inaccessible hid from our eyes.' It was partly to impress but it was also because the God whom I met in Church on Sundays was indeed a remote and lonely figure; stern, unknowable. What I have found in the Celtic Tradition is utterly different. These people were at ease in speaking of the Trinity, finding analogies not only in nature but also in daily life as in these traditional lines from Ireland:

*'Three folds of the cloth, yet only one napkin is there
Three joints in the finger, but still one finger fair
Three leaves of the shamrock, yet no more than one to wear
Frost, snowflakes and ice all in water their origin share
Three Persons in God to one God alone we make our prayer.'*

In her endeavor to understand the Trinity, Esther pens words to which many of us can relate:

'I want to be able to take my trinitarian understanding into my daily life, into my praying and my living.'

To each person of the Trinity she turns her attention:

'I think of the making and creating role of the father and how much of my life can be seen as co-operation with that; anything that I do to create, to awaken, to cherish new life; what I do to mould and shape the environment, such as the clearing of a tangle of briars and undergrowth strangling the new life in a neglected corner of the garden. I think also of the more profound creating of new human flesh in my own womb and the cherishing of that in my children's early years. Now in more recent years there has been the creating and making with words to be shaped and handled with delight and ease'

'To the Son who bought my freedom I commend all that I may try to do in working with people, teaching and listening trying to expand their horizons, trying to widen hearts and imaginations through the sharing with others of what I have myself received from my study of St Benedict, Thomas Merton, The Cistercian fathers or the Celtic Tradition.'

'Finally, to the special role of the Holy Spirit, I commend all the work of compassion and forgiveness and healing that must happen time and again throughout my life: The mending and making whole again.'

Here it seems to me is a glowing example of what it means to say 'In God we live and move and have our being.' In God we have a share in works that create, redeem, and sanctify; in works that preserve, restore and grace'

Esther gave thanks to the Celts for having helped her to be more at ease with that Triune mystery before which we will always be lost in wonder, love, and praise. They help her, she says, to see that mystery as supporting, refreshing, and strengthening her in her life's work and so, dear friends, with us.

In the name of the Triune God we are baptized and marked for ministry. In the name of the Triune God we are called in the spirit of today's readings to live in the goodness of God, the love of God, and in Communion with God. We are called to know our true vocation as stewards of creations, servants of the love and peace of Christ, ministers of that communion in which his spirit makes his dwelling.

In the name of the Triune God we are gathered in Eucharist and then sent for service in the world. Whenever in God's Holy name we undertake a special work through ordination or communion installation we do so in the great confidence of the words attributed to St Patrick:

'I bend unto myself this day the strong name of the Trinity'

In the name of the Triune god we go forth, our daily labor to pursue. To that Triune God be praise and glory as it was, is now and ever shall be. Amen

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