

ADDRESS

for the Synod of the Diocese of the Holy Cross
in Dunwoody, Georgia, at St. Barnabas, as part of
the Joint Synods of the Conference of Continuing Anglican Churches

Thursday, October 5, 2017

A warm welcome to one and all, with special thanks for our host parish, St. Barnabas, Dunwoody, and to Bishop Chad Jones, and Canon Robert Bader, and to Debbie Weaver and Jack Wyatt, our meeting planners, and to our Diocesan organizers, Susan Fulljames and Kate Moore, and to all of you for taking the time to come to these Joint Synods, especially our ecumenical partners from the Polish National Catholic Church, Bishop Paul Sobiechowski from New Hampshire, and Father Rob Nemkovitch from Massachusetts. We have labored for so many years to come to this day. The movement that was launched in 1977, forty years ago in St. Louis, now finds that its various jurisdictions are securely on converging paths. Tomorrow the bishops of four of our jurisdictions will sign a concordat of full communion with one another, to put in writing what we have been living for the past ten years, and to take the steps that will make us an organically united church. Our wilderness years have taught us how to live together in Christ, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and what we have before us is a promised land with amazing possibilities.

Canon Jonathan Ostman has proposed that we place our Joint Synods under the patronage of King Charles the Martyr. St. Charles, martyred in 1649 in London, shared our ecclesiology and died for the Catholic Faith, by defending the Episcopate and the Book of Common Prayer. We give thanks for his witness, and ask for his prayers, along with those of his Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, who was martyred in 1645.

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jesus says, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.” (John 15: 1)

We are giving thanks today that God has brought us through a forty year wilderness, and that we are now, like Israel of old, in the Plains of Moab, ready to enter a promised land. What is this promised land for us? What is God calling us to do there? What is He calling us *to be*?

Jesus is the true Vine, and we are the branches, where the grapes grow, grapes that have made our Diocese into a rich and complex wine. And together with our sister jurisdictions, we are a rich and complex wine. Adding in our ecumenical partners makes us richer still.

Jesus continues: “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” One thing we do in the vineyard, in a promised land, is to share what we have. After Hurricane Harvey hit Texas, some of our Anglican Church Women and people in other jurisdictions gave generously to help our parish in Cypress, St. Peter’s, where Father John Needham is the Rector.

Another thing we do in the vineyard, in a promised land, is to grow. We have three new missions on the drawing board, in Adam, New York, with Father Richard Cumming, in Beaufort, South Carolina, with Archdeacon Jay Boccabello, and in Hopeful, Georgia, with Father Jonathan Ulsaker. Our youth work centers in the St. Michael's Conference in Michigan, and in St. Theodore's Chapel, at the C. S. Lewis Student Center, in Columbia, South Carolina. We have a seminarian at St. Vladimir's, Raymond Davison, and a graduate of Asbury, Benjamin Howard. Father Gene Geromel is running a post-ordination training program, which this summer may include a newly ordained priest in England, in the Nordic Catholic Church there.

Our vision in the great re-alignment taking place throughout the Body of Christ is more challenging than a mere return to old denominational or national church identity. Our ecumenical partnerships look more like the conciliarity of the first millennium. We have had many fruitful contacts this past year with the Greek Orthodox. Father Tom Monnat meets regularly with the Orthodox Brotherhood in the Philadelphia metropolis. In September we had a week with Bishop Kyrillos in Debrecen, Hungary. There have been several meetings with the Polish National Catholic Church (the PNCC) in Scranton, Pennsylvania, Norway and the United Kingdom. We are extending our contacts to include the Traditional Anglican Communion in the UK, and the UK branch of the Anglican Catholic Church. This March, the PNCC is inviting us all to Scranton, to gather for a couple of days and set our discussions forward. They have a great gift to offer us all: holy orders recognized by Rome, and theology recognized by Orthodoxy.

After we go home tomorrow, the G-4 bishops, those signing the Concordat, will continue our monthly teleconferences. We can set up a common directory, exchange our intercession lists, or use the kind Father Erich Zwingert sent out some months ago. We can have a discussion about an eventual headquarters in Washington, D.C. or a neighboring city. For now, we have complete reciprocity in our common life for clergy and laity alike. We have three priests serving in the Anglican Province of America: Father Geordy Geddings in Alto, Georgia, at St. Thomas, Canon Robert Bader here in Dunwoody, at St. Barnabas, and Father Jonathan Ulsaker, in Douglassville, Georgia, at Christ the King. Father Chip Angell, our Diocesan Chancellor in Westminster, South Carolina, recently hosted a clergy retreat for us, to help us draw a bead on where we are headed. Father Peter Geromel is serving in a parish of the Anglican Church in America in Tuxedo, New York, and another, in Quakertown, in the Anglican Catholic Church. Priests of other jurisdictions serve us in places like Birmingham, Alabama, and Greenwood, South Carolina, where our old friend, Father George Clendenin, our Banquet Speaker tonight from the Province of Christ the King, is helping us at St. Andrew's.

We will move toward being one jurisdiction with a common name. The PNCC will want us to call ourselves a church, not a province. We will start out with the canons we have, with a review of how to eventually create one body of canon law for us all. When we get to speed bumps we can slow down and take our time. There is an old parable about how we are to relate to each other. In hell, at meal-time, everyone is given a three foot long spoon with which to eat. Everyone is frustrated because he cannot get the spoon into his mouth. In heaven, everyone gets the same three foot spoon, but feeds the person sitting next to him.

All that has been said so far is about what we can do in our promised land. As for what we are *to be*, we have our Lord's words, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

Planting a vine requires preparation of the soil. Planting most crops requires ploughing. If we are draft horses, or mules pulling a plough to turn a furrow, we want to be able to say "there's no slack in the harness," and, "there's bite to the plough." What we are looking at here with the PNCC and the NCC and the Greek Orthodox and our own Joint Synods is complex, deepening, spreading, interconnecting root systems of tender young grape vines in a vineyard. In his new book, *The Church in the Making*, Nikolaus Loudovikos calls these root systems in the Kingdom *consubstantial*. They grow to co-inhere one another, through their common connection with the divine energies released by our Lord, in the Spirit. Or, to use the wonderful Greek phrase, the root systems, our charisms in the Body, are *perichoretic*, just as are the two natures of Christ, in His one Person, and as are the three Persons, in one God, co-indwelling one another.

Father Loudovikos asks the question, "What is the Church?" And using the brilliant theology of St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662) we do not settle on an answer that is merely institutional, or structural; we include these, and go beyond, as "a dynamic fact of participation in the mode of divine being..." a participation, a treasure, held in earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4: 7). We are *vessels in the making*. Maximus does not define the Church; he observes the way the Church is being constituted in Christ through the Spirit...*the Church in the making*.

O. Henry explored the theme of a family in the making with his wonderful short story, *Gift of the Magi*, set in early twentieth century New York. Christmas is coming, and a young married couple, living in great simplicity, with very little money, prepare to buy gifts for each other. The husband has an inherited gold pocket watch, but no fob. The wife has beautiful long hair, which she sells, to buy a platinum fob chain for her husband's watch. He sells his watch, to buy a set of ivory combs for his wife's hair. We do not define this family in the making — we rejoice in the way it is constituted by consubstantial and priceless love.

This is a love that flows back and forth from bridegroom to bride. To use the lively Greek word, this love is *perichoretic*: it goes around, it dances around, in and through each person surrendered to it. It brings us into an unconfused union with one another, in Christ. It does not abolish our natural differences, but it joins us together without confusion, in Christ.

The Church is always to abide in her Lord, to reveal His priceless love. God always raises up saints to help His people face the challenges and crises before them. Before the terrible crisis of 1914, God raised up St. Seraphim of Sarov and St. John Vianney and St. Therese of Lisieux. Before WWII, he raised up Padre Pio and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Edith Stein and many others. The love they reveal to us, as they pass ever more deeply into Christ's life of sacrifice, is consubstantial with us. Their share in the eternal victory of our risen Lord is mediated to us in the Holy Spirit, so that we can live reciprocally with them, and with one another, in our various jurisdictions. As we abide more completely in Christ, our Vine, the Holy Spirit is tuning the static out of our lives, pruning us, and making us, in our fellowship, ever

more consubstantial, co-inherent and perichoretic. He brings us to the banqueting house, and His banner over us is love. (Song of songs 2: 4) May many others find their way to this place where God's people are blessed and governed and lifted up.