

Driving the faithful from their church

Letter from the Primate...

26th February 2009

To Bishop David Moyer, Rita, and their wonderful family, to the clergy, and all who serve the parish of the Good Shepherd, and to all the faithful of this parish,

With a sense of great sadness, I heard this week of the legal action by the Episcopal Church seeking to deprive you of your church and rectory. My heart is with you, and hurts with you.

Your church has been that rare thing in the Episcopal Church – a place where the fullness of the faith has been taught and practiced. In the sacred precincts of this church and its wonderful Lady Chapel, the beauty of holiness has inspired generation after generation. People have come here to wrestle with their conscience, and to find repentance and forgiveness. Families have been created here before the altar, and returned again and again until, one by one, they have lain before the altar that one last time.

One of the glories of the Anglican tradition is its placing of a family at the heart of the parish. We appreciate and cherish the supreme dedication to God of the life of virginity. In a world grown weary of the ideals of the Christian family, we have also cherished the witness of our clergy families. Generations of families have been loved and cherished in your rectory, in good times and bad, in sickness and in health.

Now the church that is the custodian of all these things has moved against you, and seeks to put an end to your faithfulness. But Jesus promised that he would be with us until the end of days, and that He would stand in the midst of the smallest remnant. He promised to defend us from the Gates of Hell, gates that he will never allow to be opened to consume those who are faithful.

Hell should be before our minds in Lent. Hell is the ultimate destiny for those who defy God to His face. "Depart from me, ye cursed" are words of Jesus that the Episcopal Church has long disowned. You must remember that those who defy God always create a replica of Hell in their own time and their own place. The recent history of our race that was created in the very image and likeness of God, is filled with too many Hells. The Roman mob screaming for Christian blood as the animals approached the little band of men and women and their children huddled together in the arena must have seemed to them very like Hell. And those first Christians, alone with only their faith to protect them, raised their voices in songs of praise, and by their aloneness and their praise, a savage empire was converted to the sign of the cross.

We must pray for those who persecute us. We must put all the power of our minds and hearts to the praise of the God who creates, and judges His creation. We must forgive, and then forgive again, until seventy times seven, as Our Lord has commanded us. We cannot see where God will lead us. But we know what He commands us to do.

You are in my heart this morning, as you face the next few days and months. But your future is assured. Saint Matthew remembered the words of Jesus with startling clarity: Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."