

Synod of the Traditional Anglican Church in Britain, Lincoln, April 11, 2008

Bishop's Address

Grace and peace be unto you in the Name of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ whose Resurrection we celebrate in this festive Season as we gather here in this incredibly historic church as the place for our Synod.

Firstly, I want to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to Father Gray for hosting this Synod, and to all who worked with him to make it possible, and for it being so well-organized for our comfort for this very brief time in which we will be together to do the work of the Lord. Secondly, I want to express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to our Vicar General, Father Brian Gill for all he has done for this Synod; and more so, for the way he has assisted me in so many ways in my episcopal ministry when I have been here in the last three years, and when I am on the other side of the pond exercising a ministry that can only have a degree of effectiveness because of what he supplies to me. He is a model Anglo-Catholic priest, and his lovely wife, Ann, has many jewels in her crown.

Thirdly, I want to thank my brother bishop, Robert Mercer, who I not only have admired as a model for godly episcopal ministry, and who has represented me so many times for confirmations and ordinations in my absence. I will tell you that when I was approached by the Anglican Church of America to become a bishop, a major part of my discernment to allow myself to be elected involved thinking about the presence of Bishop Mercer as a member of the College of Bishops for the Traditional Anglican Communion. I said to myself, "If Bishop Mercer is part of this gang, it would be an honour and privilege for me to be a part as well."

I want to say that I admire the courage and conviction of all of you - clergy and laity alike. You were graced by God at different times to stand up for the faith once delivered to the saints because you believe in it, and because you knew your stewardship of it for God's glory and for the benefit of others. Yes, we all individually came to the point at different times and circumstances where our consciences would not allow us to be involved in a church that had wilfully abandoned her heritage. None of us wanted to leave the places where we had been nurtured and where we had given so much, but we could no longer allow ourselves to in any way further the revision and deconstruction of the faith and order of the Church Catholic as expressed in the Anglican tradition, when the institution that was to safeguard it and commend it to others had altered it into something that it was never intended to be.

None of us is against new things and progress, but when the fundamentals of the faith and order of the Church had been changed by a majority vote, we could no longer support the institution.

But all that is in the past, and we all have scars and wounds from our decisions, but we know that Jesus had and has scars and wounds from His decision to be obedient to His Father's will. Our task now is to get on with things, and to keep our hands to the plough, and to know that if we pool our God-given gifts we can move forward with the mission of the Church.

We are small, and we're not exactly young. Our Lord doesn't count heads, but I do believe that He wants us to grow the Church so that it is stronger tomorrow and the day after tomorrow than it is today. We are to work and pray hard one day at a time, and but also to have a common plan for this growth to happen for the long haul. And in my judgement and that of the TAC's College of Bishops, the long haul is reunion with the See of Peter.

Many of you know that in October, the TAC's College of Bishops met in Portsmouth, and from that Spirit-led meeting came a petition to the Holy See for it to give us a way as a Church to be unified with the Roman Catholic Church.

Let me share with you some of the thinking which underlay the College of Bishops' petition to the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

We are called, both as individuals and as an ecclesial community, to make Christian unity a lifelong commitment, just as we are called to spread the Gospel to the whole world. When we ourselves united together, our purposes were to identify, reaffirm and consolidate amongst ourselves the elements of belief, sacraments, structure and conduct that mark the Church of Christ, which is one throughout the world. It was always our purpose to seek as a body full and visible communion, particularly eucharistic communion, in Christ, with the Roman Catholic Church. This was because, in these times of disunity even among the Great Churches, we believed the fullest subsistence of Christ's one Church was to be found there. But our intention was always to do this in such a way as would maintaining the Anglican heritage of spirituality, liturgy, discipline and theology. This heritage does not of course depend on one country or one period, but on many communities throughout the world over several centuries.

Your bishops have been called by God to exercise leadership that is faithful and consistent to the Gospel, and we are accountable to each other and to the clergy and laity of the Church. We seek nothing more than to be faithful to the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ which He uttered on the night before He went to the Cross as the bearer of the world's sin and brokenness that "they all be one." As we seek to fulfil His prayer, we are to know that He knows our fears and concerns. He was fully Man. We must all get beyond old prejudices and hurts so that there is the unity that our Lord wills. And it is unity that we seek, not absorption.

As one gets older, one realizes the truth of what St. Paul said, "Apollos planted, I watered, and God gave the growth." Some of you have been planters, and some of you have watered, and some of you have done both, but God gives the growth when we discern with minds and hearts guided by the Holy Spirit what we must do.

I fully realize that it would be a much better situation for you if you had a residential bishop, a man to be here amongst you and for all of you instead of having me come and go, and come far too seldom than I would like to do. I do believe that I will be able until the time you are able to elect a residential bishop to be here more often.

Until that time, I ask all of you to assist me in assisting you. In this world of advanced telecommunications, there are things we can work on together without being able to be in each other's physical presence, and with planes crossing the Atlantic many times a day, I can be here fairly soon when needs arise.

The challenge before us is to draw others to the Lord through our churches. And the people we need to draw are the unchurched or the lapsed. I believe that if a person has stuck with the Church of England this far, the chances of that person leaving and coming to us is small, unless they see clearly a priest and community of Christians whose integrity has a contagious quality about it, a type of irresistibility, a priest and community who clearly believes what they say, and says what they believe, and a church that is committed to and confident in a larger vision for unity in and for the Church of Christ.

I am a priest largely because I saw a difference in certain people that fascinated me and cast a spell upon me. I wanted to find out more why they were the way they were. It was St. Francis of Assisi who said that "You may be the only Gospel your neighbour ever reads." The questions are, "What do they read in us? "What do they see in us?"; "Do they see in us that Someone else is at our centre?" "Do others see that we have a larger vision beyond ourselves for the Church?"

Let this Synod be a springboard for new things to happen amongst us and for others. God will use us if we ask Him to be used. God bless you.