

Dear Friends,

We are now half way through Lent and will soon be experiencing within the Church, throughout Holy Week, the most horrific and yet the most wonderful event that ever happened, and shall ever happen, to the world and mankind, the dreadful scourging and putting to death on a Cross of one who had done nothing to deserve it but had lived a life of love and service and teaching those who would hear, the need for everyone to try to follow Him and grow in holiness. As He said would happen on the third day after His death, He rose again from the dead on the great Day of Resurrection which we in English call Easter Sunday.

It is amazing that people are prepared to believe the most outlandish rubbish but reject the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which, not for the sake of trying, no one has been able to conclusively disprove.

As the people who know the truth of the Resurrection, we must not only remember Jesus the Christ who revealed Himself as the most perfect human being that ever lived, and also worship Him as the Second Person of the One God, the most Holy and undivided Trinity, but it is also part of our Christian vocation and the command of Christ himself, to share this life-enriching and saving knowledge with others. It is the solemn duty of every Christian to try to convert the unbeliever and the sceptic. This can and will only be done, not through violence and coercion, but through a personal experience of Christ, a genuine knowledge of the Holy Bible, the teaching of His holy Body the Catholic Church, and through steadfast prayer and loving service. The Truth will prevail in the end.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome Fr. Michael Massey, and Fr Raymond Lee as Priests in the Traditional Anglican Church. Fr. Massey lives in Bristol. Fr. Lee lives in Southampton. May God richly bless them in their ministry among us in His Holy Church.

During this month as we observe Lent and seek a closer intimacy with Christ in our own lives let us also resolve to pray, with deep commitment, for the Church, all Christian people, and the conversion of all unbelievers to Christ, and the many Christians around the world suffering persecution for their faith. May you have a holy and fruit-bearing time with our Blessed Lord.

Your Priest & Friend,

Fr. Brian.

Sermon preached by Fr. Geoffrey Andow on 5th January 2008 at the Ordination of Michael Clothier to the Diaconate.

He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve ... I (Christ) am among you as he that serveth. St. Lk 22:26-27.

The Preface to the Ordinal attached to the Book of Common Prayer, asserts that “it is evident unto all men diligently reading holy Scripture and ancient Authors, that from the Apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church: Bishops, Priests, and Deacons,” while in Article XXV it included Orders as one of those “commonly called Sacraments [which] are not counted for Sacraments of the Gospel.”

In conformity then, with what is implied by the Preface, it is enough to insist that for Anglicans there is a real distinction between, conferring holy orders upon a man, and admitting him with due formality to a ministry officially recognised by the Church, for instance that of a reader. Ordination, like baptism, conveys what is in theological language called 'character' - once a priest always in some true sense a priest, even if unfrocked, just as once baptised always in some true sense a Christian, even if an apostate. Thus a valid baptism or a valid ordination cannot be repeated.

“*He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve ... I [Christ] am among you as he that serveth*” (Lk 22: 26-27). These are some of Christ's words at the Last Supper, spoken in the context of a dispute among the disciples as to “which of them should be accounted the greatest.” Let us bear in mind that the Greek word underlying 'serves' is that from which we derive 'deacon' in English, and a literal translation would be, '...the chief, as he who deacons ... I [Christ] am among you as he who deacons.' Thus the ministry of the deacon, as with all Christian ministry, ordained or not, is a vocation to service.

What then, is distinctive about holy orders?

Bishops, priests, and deacons are ordained primarily to be something and secondarily to perform certain duties. The ordained then, may be described as 'signs.' The Church first ordains to the diaconate candidates who may subsequently become priests or bishops. Should either or both of the so-called 'higher' orders be additionally conferred upon them they do not cease to be deacons. The diaconate, because of our Lord's words, is a 'sign,' which declares to the Church and to the world the true nature of every Christian ministry. This diaconal mark is not to be absent from those ministries whose holders may have to exercise something akin to what St. Paul called "the power [authority], which the Lord hath given me," the purpose of which, he added, is "to edification and not to destruction" (11 Cor 13:10). Even if, as is sometimes said today, there is really no liturgical or other duty performed by a deacon, which a layman may not also be permitted to undertake, deacons are needed because, by the fact of their having been solemnly ordained, they signify the Church's perpetual determination to view all forms of ministry as a sharing in the diaconate of Christ. A distinctive ordained diaconate is not an optional extra.

The functions or duties of the ordained flow from what they are, through the 'character' bestowed in ordination. In Anglicanism, ordination is held both to confer 'character,' so that the ordained may be 'signs,' and also to give them power and authority, so that they may perform the functions or duties, which belong to their order.

The ordination service places much stress on the responsibility of those ordained to hold their congregations to the Christian principles of faith and to challenge false teaching with authority. As they do so their own adherence in faith and morals to Christian teaching is a key requirement much underlined in the New Testament, for, as St. Paul says in his 1st Epistle to Timothy: "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained" (1 Timothy 4:6).

So where are these principles to be found?

The Holy Scriptures, the Creeds, and the early Church with its 'Fathers' and Councils, upholding the Trinity and the two natures of the Incarnate Christ, are recognized as the authoritative basis of Christian faith. This is the foundation from which the Church exercises her teaching office, and Anglicanism, as Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626, [Bishop of Winchester]) said, "has no specific teaching other than that of Scripture interpreted by the primitive Church with which it has continuity, historical and doctrinal."

Christianity's authority comes from God through the Church. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul dwells profoundly upon the person of Christ and the Church, the household of God, of which Christ is the cornerstone, and through which the manifold wisdom of God is manifest. We, who are Christ's by baptism, need to welcome the gift of authority, as God's provision to His Church and exercised by those "that serveth" ('that deacon'), in order that she, the Church, "keep that which is committed to [her] trust" (1 Tim 6:20), in the mission God has given her, namely, "to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth" (Ephesians 1:10).

"Take thou authority to execute the office of a Deacon in the Church of God committed unto thee: ... Take thou authority to read the Gospel in the Church of God, and to preach the same" (The Ordinal: The Ordering of Deacons) [BCP].

"Take thou authority:" and what is the condition of that authority?

In a word, humility, that is the condition of ministry and witness, which will represent our Lord and make Him known and loved, and enable men to have an awareness of God. For there is, as Michael Ramsey (1904-88; Archbishop of Canterbury) put it, "only one kind of person who makes God known and realized by other people, and that is the person who is humble because he knows God and knows God because he is humble. There is no substitute for this. It is only a humble [ordained] man who is authoritatively a man of God, one who makes God real to his fellows" (The Christian Priest Today, p. 78).

In The Homilies, the 1559 edition, appears an admonition to all ministers ecclesiastical, which reads, “*For that the Lord doth require of His 'servant, whom He hath set over His household' (Matt 24:45), to show both faithfulness and prudence in his office, it shall be necessary that ye, above all other, do behave yourself most faithfully and diligently, in your so high a function; ... so that your people may have cause to glorify God for you, and be the readier to embrace your labours, to your better commendation, to the discharge of your consciences and their own*” (Griffiths edition, Oxford, 1859).

Keep faith with the divine humility, which is the secret of Christ's commission to you to 'deacon,' for “*he that is greatest among you, ... and he that is chief, ... [is] he that doth serve. I [Christ] am among you as he that serveth*” (Lk. 22:26-27), and take comfort in St. Peter's exhortation to faithfulness, “*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you*” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

At this service of the Ordering of Deacons, on this the Eve of the Epiphany, when the Incarnate God was manifested forth to the world, we address our prayer to Him the 'Day-star, radiance from the eternal Light, sun-rise that is the world's amending,' in words by Bishop Christopher Wordsworth (1807-85; Bishop of Lincoln):

Grant us grace to see Thee, Lord,
Mirrored in Thy holy Word;
May we imitate Thee now,
And be pure, as pure art Thou;
That we, like to Thee may be
At Thy great Epiphany;
And may praise Thee, ever blest,
God in man made manifest.
Amen.