

AD CLERUM

May 2009- No 2

“RECEIVE THE CURE OF SOULS WHICH
IS BOTH MINE AND YOURS”

Dear brothers and
sisters in the Lord,

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I hope you are all well and blessed and enjoying the extended celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord during this Eastertide. The fifty days of Easter are nearly over and we are looking forward to celebrating the Ascension of our Lord and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church on Pentecost Sunday.

I take this opportunity to share with all of you this most beautiful Easter sermon delivered by the Archbishop of Canterbury in Canterbury Cathedral this year. I hope it will stimulate your prayer and reflection as much as it did mine. The complete text follows:

1. **The Archbishop of Canterbury's EASTER SERMON**

Do you know that God exists? the interviewers ask; or, How do you know Christian faith is true? There are two tempting ways of responding, both wrong. There is the apologetic shuffle of saying, 'Of course, I don't really know; this is just the truth as it appears to me and I may be wrong'. And there is the confident offer to prove it all to the hearer's satisfaction; here are the philosophical arguments, here is the historical evidence, now what's the problem?

Two kinds of mistake: the first because it reduces faith to opinion and shrinks the scale of what you're trying to talk about to the dimensions of your own mind and preferences; the second because it keeps you at arms' length from the whole business by making it impersonal: here are the proofs and it doesn't much matter what I or anyone may be doing about it. It's just true in much the same way as it's true that Ben Nevis is the highest mountain in the British Isles. You may say, 'Well, there you go' but are unlikely to fall to your knees.

St Paul in today's epistle makes it clear that to speak of Jesus' resurrection is also to say something crucial about who and where we are, not just to make a claim about the past. Now we should not doubt for a moment that Paul means what he says and that he takes for granted that the resurrection of Jesus is not a piece of fantasy or wishful thinking but the actual emptying of a grave. However, the point of Paul's entire teaching on the resurrection is to take us much further than that. This event, the emptying of the grave, has done something and has brought the Christians of Colossae – like all Christians – into a new universe. They are living in a new climate, with new 'thoughts' – a climate in which the various ways in which we've put up barriers between ourselves and God have been shattered and our old selves are dead. We may still go on trying to put those barriers back up again, but something has happened that opens up a new kind of future. Our selfish and destructive acts and reactions can be dealt with, overwhelmed again and again by the love shown in the cross of Jesus. Because of Jesus' death and rising from the dead, our resurrection has started, and our citizenship in heaven has begun. There is a hidden seed of glory within us, gradually coming to its fullness.

Resurrection has started. How do we know? Not by working it out and adopting it

as well-founded opinion, not by deciding that this idea suits us, not by getting all the arguments straight, but because we are dimly aware of something having changed around us. For Paul's converts in Colossae, Corinth, or wherever, it's about the impact on them of his early visits: here was someone who although he wasn't a good speaker or a charismatic teacher (so he himself tells us) was so intensely aware that the world had changed that he changed the world for those around him. They trusted him; they were prepared to risk all the mockery and harassment and worse that Christians had to put up with because they were able to say, 'It's so real for him that we can sense the sort of imperative urgency in what he says and what he sees; whatever he believes, this is life at a new level'.

That's why the two sorts of defence of faith I mentioned earlier aren't good enough. It's not that this is an attractive theory that I've decided to try out – but I may be wrong. Nor is it that I now have a knock-down argument that will convince everyone. There is something compelling here. I can't help being drawn to this promise of life and freedom, it isn't about my opinions only; yet I know that I can't put this into neat words that will make everyone say, 'Oh yes, it's obvious really'.

For a great many people, the burning question about faith is not just, 'Can anyone believe this?' but 'Can anyone live like this?' Is it possible to live 'in heaven', in such a way that our selfishness is eroded? To live on the basic assumption that people can be healed of their miserable compulsions to fear and resent each other and to cling to their grievances and injuries? Last weekend's television drama, 'Five Minutes of Heaven', was a painfully sensitive reflection on what it takes to make reconciliation more than words alone, when a former terrorist gunman meets the brother of the man he killed in cold blood. Both, it turns out, are still locked into that past event: the gunman, though he has now become a sought-after speaker on reconciliation, is still trapped in self-loathing; the victim's brother, who witnessed the shooting as a boy of ten, is equally trapped, traumatised by what he saw as a child, helpless with rage that his brother's murderer has been 'forgiven' by a society with a short memory. When they meet at last, it is in an explosion of near-murderous violence; yet something is released, some future is opened.

'Five Minutes of Heaven': we're left in no doubt that if real reconciliation were possible, that would be what it was, five minutes of something quite other than the expectations and routines of this tragic world. And we're left in no doubt that getting there might be the most painful thing imaginable. The drama spared us nothing; but it did – courageously – suggest that 'heaven' was not an illusion. Can anyone live like that? Well, perhaps, perhaps just getting to the outer edge of something 'outside' the endless weary exchange of retaliation. A fleeting image of what Paul is talking about: another world that has taken root in this one – only not just through the chance experiences of a few individuals but because something has happened once and for all to declare that sin has been dealt with, the prison of the self has been broken open by God. The impossible is now possible. Your life is hidden with Christ in God, and you live from a depth newly opened up in you.

And the only way of saying that, of course is for it to be lived out. It's no use talking endlessly – preaching endlessly – about reconciliation and forgiveness and liberation. No argument can persuade anyone about this, only the lived reality. It's worth remembering that Paul of Tarsus joined the Christian community not as a well-meaning religious enquirer but as someone who had been the equivalent of a terrorist gunman, someone who had supervised the activities of a private militia devoted to abducting and imprisoning members of the Christian sect. He is a perfectly intelligible figure in the back streets of modern Beirut or Baghdad. And he has to find his 'heaven' by going, undefended and unvouched for, to the people he has been trying to silence and kill. Can anyone live like this? If the Colossians or Corinthians or Philippians had asked this, at least Paul would have been able to say yes: I have lived it, or, It has lived itself out in me and in those who were my victims. No wonder that he goes back over this so many times in his writings, and,

in his second letter to Corinth, angrily protests that, whatever else may be true, he is not doing this for the sake of his comfort or power. Why should the Corinthians trust him (especially when there are more attractive teachers around)? Well, at least he has lived through the most appallingly painful realities of the reconciliation that Jesus made possible; he has lost an entire career, an entire identity, he has put his life at daily risk. The one thing the Corinthians can be sure of is that this is not an opinion or an argument.

And the moral of all this? It's boringly familiar. If we want to commend our faith, we have to show the difference. The new world has to be visible. In the days of the early church, writers trying to defend the faith naturally used all sorts of complex intellectual arguments; but they also said, 'Look at us. We try to live forgivingly with each other. We don't try to get revenge when we're killed by the state authorities or the lynch mobs. We treat every life as precious, including the lives you don't care about. We try to be peaceful and faithful, in private and in public, and to live lives of sexual faithfulness and self-control [as much of a challenge, we might add, in the late Roman Empire as it is today]. Does all this suggest to you that there might be another way of living that offers healing to the casualties of so-called ordinary human behaviour?'

Early Christians could point to the martyrs – but also to those who freely decide to live lives of continence and poverty in the first monastic communities, the men and women who tried to live out the life of heaven in the daily discipline of life together, giving themselves time to discover their most deeply hidden failings and fears, their most deep-seated difficulties with themselves and other people and not running away but letting the action of God through the life of the community heal them bit by bit. We're still fascinated by this life – we joke about it, yet have an uneasy respect for it, as a whole series of television presentations will confirm. But there is a real question here to the Church, not least to the Church of England. More people than perhaps ever before want to have access to what the monastic life promises, the wisdom of mutual patience, shared silence and prayer, space to grow out of childish ways – yet the profile of monastic communities and the recognition given to those who seek the path of contemplation is pretty meagre. Is it time to pray for and work for a radical new affirmation of this life and a proper valuation of its gift to the Church and the world? To pray harder for vocations to this life and to encourage people of all ages to explore it and to have the courage to take those costly promises so as to begin to show the world what difference the faith makes – what the resurrection looks like?

It could hardly be a more propitious time for this. The present financial crisis has dealt a heavy blow to the idea that human fulfilment can be thought about just in terms of material growth and possession. Accepting voluntary limitation to your acquisitiveness, your sexual appetite, your freedom of choice doesn't look so absurd after all as a path to some sort of stability and mutual care. We should be challenging ourselves and our Church to a new willingness to help this witness to flourish and develop.

But it is of course only one form of witness. When all's said and done, the call is to every one of us. We need to hear what is so often the question that's really being asked when people say, 'How do you know?' And perhaps the only response that is fully adequate, fully in tune with the biblical witness to the resurrection is to say simply, 'Are you hungry? Here is food.' Amen.

2. **The Anglican Pilgrimage: A Course for Seminarians and Clergy in the Early Years of their Ordained Ministry**, will be held in Canterbury, England, from

Wednesday 3rd to Thursday 18th June 2009. We congratulate the Revds Lulama Dumisa and Cedric Buthelezi who have been successful in their applications. We are also extremely grateful to the Dean of the Canterbury Cathedral for providing

them with scholarships.

We wish Lulama and Cedric a safe journey overseas and a profitable and enriching time at the heart of Anglicanism.

3. **“The Messenger”**: no doubt we all have noticed the much improved layout of the new Messenger. It is our wish to continue improving it and making it

available at least two or three times a year. Unfortunately, we do experience financial constraints and we need all the support we can get to be able to do so on a more regular basis. I am therefore asking you to help us by forwarding your donation - as invited to do during our Chrism Eucharist - to the Diocesan Office using the “Lekelela” form and stating clearly “The Messenger”.

4. **Diocesan Synod 2009: “Exploring together Synod Issues”**.

I want to encourage you to make good use of the document produced by the Synod Task team and given to you during our recent HIV-AIDS workshop at KwaNzimela. By the time you receive this *Ad Clerum* many of you will have already dealt with it at different levels within your own parishes. A comprehensive feed-back is expected from all parishes ideally by May 19th when you will be meeting in Archdeaconry chapters. If any of you is unable to meet this deadline, do not despair. You can still share your reflections and send your feedback directly to me, preferably before the end of this month.

5. **Ordination to the Diaconate**: on Sunday 21st June at the Nkandla eMakhosini Hall. The service will begin promptly at 10H00. The names of the ordinands

will be communicated to you as soon as a final decision has been made.

6. **Lenten Offerings**: due at the end of the current month.

This is all for now. I keep you all in my prayers especially as we prepare to celebrate the great feast of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday. May the Lord bless you and keep you in his love.

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+Dino