

Palm Sunday
Evensong 20th March 2016.

† Sister and brothers in Christ, the Palm Sunday procession in Jerusalem 2,016 years ago which the Church recalls this day ushered in the most momentous events in world history. A chain reaction was unleashed that is still being felt around the world, at least in the West. By that I mean when St Paul began his missionary journeys in the Mediterranean region he carried the message of salvation, that is the process of being made whole, by being baptised into Christ, that resonated around the then known Western world. In short, the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth was the foundation of the concept of what we now know as “the West”. Although, of course, there was St Thomas’ mission to India it is impossible to say that the culture of that country has been significantly Christianised. It is still predominantly Hindu and Moslem. Certainly, in British India the Church made some headway and is still there but very much as a minority movement as it is in the rest of Asia.

Christianity, however, shaped the Western world into what it became. The spread of the Faith throughout the Graeco-Roman world, to northern Europe and then to the Americas and Africa and the Pacific is still on-going. But as we well know the reception of the Faith has not by any means been uniform, especially in the West, and it is still far from conflict free. Indeed, the fractured condition of Christianity is undoubtedly the greatest obstacle to its ability to perform its task of healing the world, that is to deliver the message of salvation to all peoples. The realisation of Jesus’ high priestly prayer

in John 17: 20-21, prior to his Crucifixion, namely that they all may be one is as remote as ever. It has been recently lamented by the world's leading theologians, chiefly by Professor Hans Küng. He has repeatedly warned that there will be no peace in the world until there is first peace among the Churches, and when that has been achieved a serious inter-Faith dialogue can begin with the object of the reconciling of the world's great religions. That is why the inter Church dialogue is of paramount concern for all humanity.

So, sisters and brothers in Christ, as Professor Küng has so eloquently written, this is the most urgent priority facing the peoples of the world at the present time. And who can gainsay that in the light of the many religion-based conflicts that are occurring around the world at the present time. Note the status Jesus gave to peace in his farewell discourse related in John 14: 27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you; not as the world give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled nor let them be afraid." So Jesus' priority has to be our priority at every level of existence, that is private, public, in domestic politics and especially in international politics where the destructive power of conflict is limitless. The possibility of nuclear destruction has to be the greatest blasphemy of all time because nothing less is at stake than the very existence of God's Creation. How could we, being mere creatures, endorse such an outcome? Our Christian faith taken seriously has to make us deal with this at the grass roots. We are God's children whose duty it is to obey his commands for our own good, that is to preserve His Creation of which we are an organic part.

And in order to implement God's will we need to be open to dialogue first with our fellow Christians who disagree with us. We have to be able to tolerate each other first and foremost. But here in Australia this is very difficult because of the deep theological split within our own Church which cripples us in our ecumenical endeavours so the way forward is very problematic. Such a situation is nothing short of tragic and it challenges us all to find a solution. It reminds me of the former insurmountable difficulties experienced between the governments of both West and East Germany during the Cold War, for example, in coming to simple trade agreements and enabling travel between the two parts of the one country. Residents of East Germany found it virtually impossible to visit relatives in West Germany and vice versa because of the insoluble ideological conflict. In a word, the dogmatic position adopted by the dictators of Marxism-Leninism made it impossible to negotiate even at a human level. Why was that? Curiously, the Communist ideologues, that is the intellectuals who interpreted the Marxist-Leninist dogmas, claimed in the most fanatically religious way that they possessed the *absolute truth*. They demanded, therefore, that all subjects, but especially Christians, abandon their faith and submit their will unconditionally to the rule of what they called *Real Existing Socialism*. There was only one truth and its custodians were the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

There was, in short, a structure in place which was remarkably similar to what exists still in the Roman Church and also in some dioceses in the Anglican Church around the world. That is to say

there is a hierarchy of authority that tells you what the “truth” is and you better believe it.

I really should not have to tell you that this does not coincide with what we understand to be the true spirit of Anglicanism in which we are free to seek the truth together on our pilgrimage. And before anyone takes umbrage at any implied criticism of “our gentle sister” to quote John Keble, namely the Church of Rome, let me hasten to add that I am very much aware of the efforts of Pope Francis at the present time to re-invigorate the spirit of *aggiornamento* which he is trying to infuse into its hierarchy and rank and file, a spirit that had been effectively suppressed in the reign of the late Polish Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla) who fostered a more authoritarian Roman conservatism.

On the other hand the ultra evangelical dogmatists within our own ranks, such as are found in the dioceses of Sydney, Armidale and North West Australia are hard at work suppressing the real pilgrim spirit and vocation of Anglicanism to renew the Church. They, the “Sydney Anglicans”, insist that there is virtually no need for a visible Church anymore and all that is needed is a “little flock” of essentially Bible-believing Christians isolated from the world. The last thing they want to be involved in is inter-Church or, heaven forbid, inter-Faith dialogue. In short, they dare not venture outside their fundamentalist fortress.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, the original Christians in the New Testament may have been a “little flock” fighting for their existence in a hostile pagan world, but they overcame the “little

flock” mentality and burst vigorously forth into the world to fulfil our Lord’s command. The demand of the present is simply that we recover that initial Pauline fervour, and witness in a way appropriate to the modern age, that is with charity and reason, being open to all peoples. It seems to me that the world is in need of the healing message of the Gospel now more than ever. We have to realise that we Anglicans by virtue of our historical experience are arguably the best qualified custodians of the essential Gospel calling to promote peace.

I appreciate that that is quite a claim, but I am convinced the historical record justifies it. If you want to check my sources you could easily “Google” *The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888*. There you will see spelled out the four key elements that are required for the ecumenical reconciliation. They are 1) Holy Scriptures, 2) the Catholic Creeds all of which are in our Book of Common Prayer, 3) the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist and 4) the Episcopate adapted to local needs. --- Just to give a succinct summary.

Since its enunciation the *Quadrilateral* has advanced the cause of ecumenical dialogue and collaboration considerably, notably, with the Orthodox, the Lutherans and Old Catholics. Rome who initially refused to countenance any dialogue with us at all, instead reacted with a damning Papal Bull called *Apostolicae Curae* in 1896 which intended to put a stop to all this Anglican ecumenical nonsense. This Bull by Pope Leo XIII declared Anglican Orders to be *absolutely null and utterly void* implying that we were *no Church* and should all submit to Rome. Apart from a handful of submissions it was largely

ignored. Our church continued to be the great missionary church of Empire and never doubted her calling to promote the healing of the world. Now, of course, Rome studiously avoids mention of *Apostolicae Curae* any more and has even enabled the establishment of an Anglican Centre in Rome itself to promote ecumenical dialogue. In retrospect we can say that our persistence and faith in ourselves has been rewarded. But much remains to be done, first and foremost the reconciliation that must take place between so-called “Sydney Anglicans” and the wider Church. There is, to date, however, no sign whatsoever of any willingness on “Sydney’s” part to enter into a healing dialogue, quite the opposite in fact. This leaves only one course open to us: we must proceed as if “Sydney” does not exist, as once recommended to me by Archbishop Peter Carnley of Perth, and promote inter-Church dialogue as a necessary prelude to inter-Faith dialogue. World history may not be held up or obstructed by any current falsely understood “little flock” mentality. We need to insist on taking the larger view.

Finally, sisters and brothers in Christ, during this Holy Week let us take stock of our Anglican ecumenical calling, draw strength and confidence from it and determine not to be deflected from what we know our true vocation to be.†