



St. Paul's Episcopal Church - Delray Beach, FL
Last Pentecost (Christ the King) - Proper 29 - Year C (RCL) - November 21/22, 2009
Daniel 7:9-10,13-14 Ps. 93; John 18:33-37 [38].
Preacher: The Rev. William H. Stokes, *Rector*

Some thoughts concerning the Pope's Invitation

Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" 18:37-38

I don't know if you have been following the news, but Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury was in Rome for several days beginning this past Thursday and ending yesterday. This has been covered by *The New York Times* and CNN and other news outlets. Archbishop Williams met with Pope Benedict XVI yesterday.

The two have met before but yesterday's meeting is the first since Benedict XVI announced in late October that he was creating a formal structure to receive disaffected Anglicans, specifically those uncomfortable with Anglicanism's acceptance of women as priests and bishops, as well as those troubled by Anglicanism's generally more open attitude toward gay and lesbian persons, into the Roman Catholic Church. On November 4 of this year, the Pope issued a document, *Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus*¹, which contains the specific provisions of the Pope's initiative. An Apostolic Constitution is the highest level of decree the Pope can issue.

This Apostolic Constitution creates what are designated "Personal Ordinariates," similar to dioceses within the Roman Catholic structure. Personal ordinariates created by this Apostolic Constitution are specifically designed for Anglicans who wish to go over to Rome. The ordinariates would be presided over by persons appointed by the Pope, who would be called "ordinaries," (this is not unfamiliar language for Anglicans: diocesan bishops in the Episcopal Church are referred to as the "ordinaries" because they are responsible for establishing and maintaining the norms).

The Apostolic Constitution states that "The catechism of the Catholic Church is the authoritative expression of the Catholic faith professed by members of the ordinariate."² Members of the ordinariate would be allowed to use the Book of Common Prayer and continue other aspects of Anglican piety "which," the document states, "have been approved by the Holy See, so as to maintain the liturgical, spiritual and pastoral traditions of the Anglican Communion within the Catholic Church, as a precious gift nourishing the faith of the members of the Ordinariate and as a treasure to be shared."³

With respect to Anglican clergy, The Apostolic Constitution states, “Those who ministered as Anglican deacons, priests, or bishops [and it should be noted this refers only to those *men* who have ministered as deacons, priests and bishops], and who fulfill the requisites established by canon law and are not impeded by irregularities or other impediment may be accepted by the Ordinary as candidates for Holy Orders in the Catholic Church.”⁴ “In the case of married ministers, the norms established in the Encyclical Letter of Pope Paul VI *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* [1967].... are to be observed. Unmarried ministers must submit to the norm of clerical celibacy...The Ordinary, in full observance of the discipline of celibate clergy in the Latin Church, as a rule...will admit only celibate men to the order of presbyter. He may also petition the Roman Pontiff...for the admission of married men to the order of presbyter on a case by case basis, according to objective criteria approved by the Holy See.”⁵

It should be noted, that any Anglican bishops who go over may be re-ordained as priests, but not as bishops. They may, however, be appointed as the Ordinary of the Ordinariate and invited to participate in the meetings of the Bishops’ Conferences within his region, having the equivalent status of a retired bishop. They may also petition to wear the regalia they had customarily worn as bishops. According to the terms of the Apostolic Constitution, “Every five years the Ordinary is required to come to Rome for an *ad limina Apostolorum* visit and present to the Roman Pontiff, through the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and in consultation with the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, a report on the status of the Ordinariate.”⁶

So what are we to make of all of this?

Apparently the conversation yesterday between Archbishop Rowan and Pope Benedict was cordial. The Pope reiterated his commitment to on-going relations between the two churches. It is reported that Williams was candid with the Pope in sharing his concerns about how the Vatican handled the recent announcement.⁷

Pope Benedict has consistently indicated that this initiative is a pastoral response to the “repeated and insistent” petitions of groups of Anglicans to be received into the Catholic Church⁸ and no doubt, such a pastoral invitation is appropriate and good for some people. The announcement of this initiative was made in England and it is generally understood that it was directed at Church of England members unhappy about the recent decision to allow women in England to be consecrated to the episcopate, that is, to be bishops.⁹ It is also directed to those who have been struggling with the wider acceptance of gay and lesbian persons in some parts of Anglicanism, especially in the United States and Canada. Maybe this pastoral initiative will help people find a greater comfort level and be more at ease in their faith and less angry and that’s probably a good thing.

Still, it needs to be recognized that since the announcement there have not been wholesale or widespread defections of Anglicans to Rome, nor are there likely to be. In a recent opinion article that appeared in *Episcopal Life*, The Reverend Dr. William Franklin, academic fellow at the Anglican Centre in Rome, and former dean of the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale University offered a concise explanation of why the Apostolic Constitution is not likely to have an enormous impact. Franklin writes, “The future of Christian unity foreseen in this text is found by returning to the past...the new constitution recalls...[a] 1928 encyclical which argued that the only road to Christian unity is for all to admit their errors and return to Rome...”¹⁰ The truth of the matter is that the Apostolic Constitution is not very new. Largely ignored by the media in all of this controversy is recognition of the fact that the road between Rome and Canterbury runs in both directions and has for a long time.

The December 1 issue of *Christian Century Magazine* cited the observations of Church historian Diana Butler Bass who noted that, “One trend missed in many accounts of the Vatican’s invitation...is the flow of cradle [Roman] Catholics to churches that are more accepting of divorce and birth control and more accepting of gays. She cites a 2008 Pew study that revealed one in ten adult Americans is an ex-Catholic.”¹¹

“In her study of successful mainline churches...Bass found that ‘sometimes as many as a fifth of the members had once been Catholic.’”¹² I would add that anecdotal evidence suggests that these statistics – somewhere between one fifth and one tenth -- hold up at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Delray Beach. Bass added, “In every case, the former Catholics praised the intellectual and spiritual openness of the mainline church as the major reason for switching.”¹³

Having initially been surprised by the Vatican’s announcement, and responding with predictable restraint, it appears the Archbishop of Canterbury is now responding more forthrightly to the Pope and his initiative and beginning to push back appropriately by stating the positive qualities of Anglicanism and why, at least at present, it offers a vitally important alternative to Rome.

According to *The Times* of London, in an address on Thursday at an ecumenical conference meeting at the Gregorian Pontifical University, the Archbishop of Canterbury, “made his most outspoken challenge to the Roman Catholic Church since the Pope invited disaffected Anglicans to switch to Rome.”¹⁴ *The Times* reported, “Williams told [the] conference...that the Catholic Church’s refusal to ordain women was a bar to Christian unity. ‘For many Anglicans, not ordaining women has a possible unwelcome implication about the difference between baptized men and baptized women,’” he said.¹⁵ Williams asserted, rightly I believe, “The Anglican provinces that ordain women had retained rather than lost their Catholic holiness and sacramentalism.”¹⁶

CNN covered that same conference and reported that Archbishop Rowan “also proposed that a truly universal Christian church might have to be structured more like the Anglican Communion -- with no central authority laying down the law -- than like the Catholic Church, with the pope on his throne.”¹⁷ In a series of rhetorical questions, Williams asked: “Is there a mechanism in the church that has the clear right to determine for all where the limits of Christian identity might be found? Is the integrity of the church ultimately dependent on a single identifiable ministry of unity to which all local ministries are accountable?”¹⁸ He was clearly echoing the concern and complaint that Anglicans have historically had with such extraordinary authority and power being vested in one person, the Pope, a concern and complaint I believe many of us share.

During the early days of the modern ecumenical movement (late 19th century), the dominant hope of those participating in the movement was that separate denominations would cease to exist and all would be enfolded into one church. That hope was never realized and was, I believe, unrealistic. The more contemporary thinking in the ecumenical movement has been that particular differences understood and held dear by particular denominations could be upheld and honored while we still understood that we were all unified under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It seems to me this is both more realistic and healthier. This is in fact what has occurred as the Episcopal Church has now entered into full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and agreed to full communion with the Moravian Church in America.¹⁹ I believe post-modernism has taught us that God is clearly a God of differences, that difference is not something to be rued, but rather should be celebrated. Diversity within unity should be our watchword.

On this observance of Christ the King, a feast inaugurated by Pope Pius XI on December 11, 1925 in the encyclical *Quas Primas*,²⁰ issued in the face of rising totalitarianism in Mussolini's Italy and in other parts of the world, I think it is important for us to remember that the Church has one head, Jesus Christ. Yet, even from its earliest inception there was variety in understanding how Christ had revealed himself to his church and how his church carried out his ministry.

Think of it, there were four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – coming from four separate churches that each had something unique to offer. Thanks be to God for that. There were Jewish Christian followers of Jesus who kept the law; there were Gentile followers who accepted Paul's teaching of justification by grace through faith.

We are Episcopalians and as such a vibrant and necessary expression of the Christian faith and, I strongly believe, a gift to the wider Church. We are sometimes portrayed as cultural, theological and moral relativists. This is patently not true. We have very clear beliefs and core values. What distinguishes us as Episcopalians, and a summary of our core values and beliefs that so many find attractive about us, was clearly articulated in an ad placed by the Episcopal Church on Friday in every issue of *USA Today* around the country.²¹ It certainly captured much of what I hold to be of enduring value about us. Here's what it said:

- As Episcopalians, we are followers of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and believe in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- The Episcopal Church has members in the United States, as well as in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Haiti, Honduras, Micronesia, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, Venezuela, and the Virgin Islands. [Note well, this is about The Episcopal Church, not the wider Anglican Communion].
- We strive to love our neighbors as ourselves and respect the dignity of every person.
- The Episcopal Church is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion, and traces its heritage to the beginnings of Christianity.
- Our liturgy retains ancient structure and traditions, and is celebrated in many languages.
- We welcome men and women, married or celibate, to be ordained as bishops, priests, and deacons.
- We believe in amendment of life, the forgiveness of sin, and life everlasting.
- Lay people exercise a vital role in the governance and ministry of our Church.[And, I would add, at every level].
- Holy Communion may be received by all baptized Christians, not only members of the Episcopal Church. [I am always grateful that as a priest I can welcome people to the Lord's Table. I think this is so important].
- We uphold the Bible and worship with the Book of Common Prayer.
- We affirm that committed relationships are lifelong and monogamous.
- Episcopalians also recognize that there is grace after divorce and do not deny the sacraments to those who have been divorced.
- We affirm that issues such as birth control are matters of personal informed conscience.
- We celebrate our unity in Christ while honoring our differences, always putting the work of love before uniformity of opinion.
- All are welcome to find a spiritual home in the Episcopal Church.

Today is the feast of Christ the King and the last Sunday after Pentecost. Next Sunday is the first Sunday in Advent and we are kicking off our “Back to Church Sundays in Advent” initiative.²² Advent presents a wonderful opportunity for you to invite family and friends to the incredible community that is St. Paul’s Episcopal Church where they can experience the love of Christ and the vibrancy and purpose of a caring Christian community making a real difference in the world.

Many people who once went to church just got out of the habit. Sure, some were mad at the church, or had a bad experience with a pastor or priest. And I am aware that some are still upset and angry; this breaks my heart. Still, many of those who don’t come to church aren’t angry and haven’t had a bad experience at all. Our *Back to Church* initiative is directed toward them. They would welcome an invitation to come to church this Advent.

As the culture bombards us with the commercialism of the Christmas shopping season, consider what a precious gift you have to offer those you care for by inviting them to church in Advent. It’s an opportunity to prepare for and recapture the true meaning of Christmas; to experience the love and presence of God in the midst of the caring and loving faith community that is St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Delray Beach. As the bumper sticker says “*Jesus really is the reason for the season.*” I hope and pray that throughout the four weeks of Advent you will be active agents in helping those you love rediscover this undeniable truth. It may be the most precious gift you give them.

¹ Complete text may be found on the Vatican website at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apc_20091104_anglicanorum-coetibus_en.html

² Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus – Paragraph I Section 1

³ Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus – Paragraph III

⁴ Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus – Paragraph VI – Section 1

⁵ Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus – Paragraph VI – Section 2

⁶ Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus – Paragraph XI

⁷ See Henry, Robin “Rowan Williams and the Pope in Historic Meet” from *TimesOnline*, November 29, 2009 found at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article6926720.ece>

⁸ See the introductory paragraph in Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus

⁹ See Donadio, Rachel and Goodstein, Laurie “Vatican Bidding to Get Anglicans to Join Its Fold” *The New York Times* – October, 20, 2009 and found at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/21/world/europe/21pope.html>

¹⁰ Franklin, The Rev. Dr. D. William “Vatican’s Apostolic Constitution Explained” which appeared on *Episcopal Life-On-Line* on November 9, 2009 and can be found at http://www.episcopalchurch.org/81840_116538_ENG_HTM.htm

¹¹ See “Century Marks: Trickle Out” in the December 1, 2009 issue of *The Christian Century Magazine*, p. 9 (quoting Beleafnet.com blog, October 22,2009). Also, please note that in the oral delivery of the sermon, I misspoke and incorrectly named the magazine as *Christianity Today*.

¹² “Century Marks: Trickle Out”

¹³ “Century Marks: Trickle Out”

¹⁴ See Gledhill, Ruth and Owen, Richard “Archbishop tells Pope: there will be no turning back on women priests” from *The Times* which appeared on *TimeOnline* on November 20, 2009 and which can be found at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article6923807.ece>

¹⁵ “Archbishop tells Pope: there will be no turning back on women priests”

¹⁶ “Archbishop tells Pope: there will be no turning back on women priests”

¹⁷ See “Pope to meet with Anglican leader amid rising tension” which appeared on the CNN on November 21, 2009 and can be found at <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/11/21/vatican.pope.archbishop/index.html>

¹⁸ “Pope to meet with Anglican leader amid rising tension”

¹⁹ For background on the agreement between the ELCA and the Episcopal Church, go to <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion/The-Episcopal-Church.aspx>; for background of the agreement between the Episcopal Church and Moravian Church in America which was been passed by The Episcopal Church's General Convention in July 2009 and is awaiting action by the Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church see "Finding our Delight in the Lord" http://www.mcsp.org/resources/ecumenical/Finding_Our_Delight_Official_Text.pdf

²⁰ For an English Translation of the text of *Quas Primas* go to http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_11121925_quas-primas_en.html

²¹ See "USA Today ad welcomes all people to the Episcopal Church" on *Episcopal Life online* at http://www.episcopalchurch.org/79901_117096_ENG_HTM.htm

²² St. Paul's "Back to Church Sundays" initiative was inspired by The National Back to Church Sunday campaign. See <http://www.backtochurch.com/about/> for additional information.