

## Sermon for Morning Prayer Sunday after Ascension Day

### I. Lessons:<sup>i</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the second Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.<sup>ii</sup>

“... In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning. And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

***The Second Lesson:*** *Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.*<sup>iii</sup>

“... Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for

ever after the order of Melchisedec. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

## **II. Text:**

From the Second Lesson: “[E]very high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ... And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was.”<sup>iv</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

## **III. Introduction:**

Many, perhaps most, of us who will hear this sermon consider ourselves to be engaged in a project to preserve and foster the sort of Catholic Christianity that was, for some 400-plus years, characteristic of the Church of England and her daughter churches around the world. Some of us use as a generic term the label “Continuing Anglican”; some of us refer to ourselves as “Traditional” or “Conservative Anglicans” or even use a more colloquial name such as “Reasserters”.

However, whatever it be that we call ourselves, and whenever we actually began calling ourselves by that identifier, whether in 1977 or in 2000 or in 2008, our self-identity is, in major ways, that of survivors who have been left behind by the drastic redefinition of Anglicanism, of Catholicism, and even of Christianity, that is now so marked a feature of most of “official” – or Canterbury-affiliated – Anglicanism. We are as living fossils, still bearing the imprints of the first 1,940 years of Christian history, although unlike true geological fossils, we intend to function instead like the seeds of “heritage varieties” of traditional domestic plants, remaining fertile and maintaining valuable characteristics that would otherwise die out.

## **IV. Theme:**

For each of us, it may have been a different specific issue that convinced any of us that we had to declare our independence, even if only our independence in some degree, from the High Priest and the Sanhedrin of the religious establishment that is centered upon Lambeth Palace. For some, it was the abandonment of historic epistemologies represented by some Provinces' arrogation to themselves of the right to purport to ordain women to the Catholic clergy, in clear derogation from the express words of Scripture and the entire, and unbroken, Tradition of the Church.

For some, it was the progressive decay of traditional moral teaching. For others, it was the subversive social engineering involved in the active promotion of homosexual activity and the so-called "gay" agenda, especially as evidenced by the promotion of an adulterous catamite who, just a few short decades ago, would have been summarily deposed from the ministry long before he could ever have been nominated for the episcopate.

Nevertheless, whatever the particular personal reason that has brought any one of us to the place where we are sitting and listening to these specific words, each of us almost certainly sees himself or herself as part of a faithful remnant of orthodox Anglicans, a band of survivors whose situation and mission bear striking resemblances to those of the peoples who struggled to maintain their Jewish faith and culture first in exile in Mesopotamia and then later in dispersion throughout the Roman Empire.

## **V. Development:**

For us, then, the Old Testament literature and prophecies associated with the "faithful remnant" resonate with reassurance and understanding of our existential situation.

### **A. The Lord has promised He will preserve a faithful remnant of His people and that remnant shall be the vehicle for the restoration of that people.**

We are told in today's First Lesson that "In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel."<sup>vi</sup> Here "the branch" is the righteous remnant that is left when the nation is restored,<sup>vi</sup> an image that, when it occurs elsewhere in Isaiah<sup>vii</sup> as well as in Jeremiah,<sup>viii</sup> refers expressly to the Messiah. Thus the notion of the

restoration of the nation in the persons of its faithful remnant is intimately bound together with the Messianic promise. In other words, the Messiah is the one who will accomplish this restoration.

This is what we, as “Continuing” or “Traditional” or “Orthodox Anglicans” aspire to be: the cadre of trained and committed Christians which the Lord can use as His instrument to refound and propagate the Anglicanism that the forces of modernism and revisionism seek to sweep away. We love the majestic liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer and the resonant cadences of the King James translation of Scripture, but our most important resource is our firm commitment to the classic understandings of how God has chosen to deal with humankind and how human beings are to seek and know God’s will for us.

It is our acceptance of divine revelation as the source of truth and of the historic Church of the Creeds as the interpreter of that revelation that is the “faithful” component of our status as the “faithful remnant”.

## **B. The mission of the faithful remnant requires that it preserve the Apostolic Ministry.**

We are told in today’s Second Lesson that “For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ... And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was.”<sup>ix</sup> Thus one of the prime qualifications of a priest is divine appointment,<sup>x</sup> not personal choice.

There are two critical aspects of this particular concept. First, before a high priest can offer gifts and sacrifices for the sins of human beings, those humans must themselves believe in and accept the reality of the forgiveness of sin. And before we can believe in and accept the reality of the forgiveness of sin, we must acknowledge the reality and inevitability of sin itself.

This is one of the key objectives of the modernist and revisionist enterprise. If it can convince us that sin is not an objective reality, but only a misunderstanding of historico-socio-politico-economic forces, then we will no longer believe in sin and will, therefore, no longer seek to obtain forgiveness for it. And if we once cease seeking God’s forgiveness for our besetting sins, then we will quickly cease seeking God at all.

That is actually what the modernists and revisionists wish: they wish us to stop looking to God and, instead, start looking first to ourselves, and ultimately to the collective representatives of ourselves in the form of political and social institutions, for whatever is of benefit on this earth. For if we begin to rely upon external structures and institutions for our wellbeing, then we become putty in the hands of those who manage and control those structures and institutions.

So the second critical aspect of the revisionist agenda is to deconstruct the historic ministry of the Church. If once those ministers cease to be divine agents, individually and involuntarily called by Our Lord into His service, and become instead functionaries and tenured placeholders in a sort of civil-service bureaucracy, then they will no longer possess the *charism*, the divine grace that has infused that ministry through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

When the Church's ministry ceases to be a grace-filled divine Office and becomes a mere social-service agency, then it will no longer have the resources or the will to resist the conversion of the Church into a collectivist hive and the reduction of the divine priestly people of God into slaves to their instincts like worker ants or bees.

## **VI. Conclusion:**

Jesus Christ, the great High Priest, acting through His personally-called ministry within His Body, the Church, is the only possible context within which the Christian life can be lived. Without Christ, we are all dead to righteousness and slaves to sin. Those who would convince us that we do not need the means of grace Christ has designed and made available to us seek to separate us from the Church or, if that prove impossible, to empty the Church of all meaning, so we may be cut off from God and in that desolated state be easily convinced to serve another master.

Remember, then, the Christian vocation is not to be a social worker or the agent of a charity; good works and charity are the by-products of Christian activity, not its objects. We are called to be a priestly people, ministering to the nations in the service of our great High Priest, He Who has already made, by His one oblation of Himself once offered upon Calvary, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.<sup>xi</sup>

The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister  
May 16, 2010.

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<sup>i</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

<sup>ii</sup> *Isaiah 4: 2-6 (KJV).*

<sup>iii</sup> *Hebrews 4: 14—5: 10 (KJV).*

<sup>iv</sup> *Hebrews 5: 1 & 4 (RSV).*

<sup>v</sup> *Isaiah 4: 2 (RSV).*

<sup>vi</sup> *HERBERT G. MAY AND BRUCE M. METZGER, THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA, EXPANDED EDITION, REVISED STANDARD VERSION 827 fn. (Oxford University Press 1977).*

<sup>vii</sup> *Isaiah 11: 1.*

<sup>viii</sup> *Jeremiah 23: 5.*

<sup>ix</sup> *Hebrews 5: 1 & 4 (RSV).*

<sup>x</sup> *MAY AND METZGER, op. cit. 1458 fn.*

<sup>xi</sup> *The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 80 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*