

Sermon for Morning Prayer Septuagesima Sunday

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Book of Joshua.ⁱⁱ

“Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Second Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to Timothy:ⁱⁱⁱ

“Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he

strive lawfully. The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits. Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

“Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[T]he things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the **¶** Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

Every institution must have reliable leadership if it is to survive. That, in turn, means that each such institution must likewise have reliable systems and procedures in place that will assure the continuation of that leadership, or else the institution may flower now only to founder later.

That is just as true of a divine institution, such as the Church, as it is of a purely human and secular institution, such as a business corporation, a school or college, or a government agency. It is, however, even more important for the Church to have such reliable arrangements because a secular institution can always be revived or refounded or replaced and, if that happens, the leadership of the new or restored entity will derive its authority and capacity from that restoration of function.

The Church, unlike such secular entities, has a *sacramental* dimension and its leadership must always maintain sacramental capacities that do not concern such mundane bodies. Our mechanism for this is the *Apostolic Succession*, the

continuous chain formed by the Church's leaders' carefully commissioning their co-workers and successors. In today's Second Lesson, we see St. Paul instructing St. Timothy, in how that chain is formed and operates.

Timothy was a Christian native of Lystra, in Asia Minor, where Paul had found him during Paul's journeys through that area and had enlisted him as one of his assistants. Now Paul has moved on from Asia Minor to Macedonia, in northern Greece, and has left Timothy as his delegate to oversee Paul's congregations in and around Ephesus. Today's Lesson is part of what we might term Paul's "field manual" for his new regional commander or manager and that commander or manager's duties include finding, training, and appointing subordinate commanders or middle managers to function under him.

Theme:

When we think about that Apostolic Succession – if, indeed, we ever do, and do not simply take it for granted – we simply take it as a given that the clergy of the Church, and in particular, its Bishops, trace from our familiar and likeable present Bishop back into the dim far reaches of history, assuring some sort of continuity of legitimacy, or at least of good order and decency in our internal operations, but that is usually as far as our consideration goes.

Development:

However, there are three aspects to this Apostolic Succession, each of which must be in place for that Succession actually to exist in any meaningful way, and therefore for the Church to be assured that the sacramental aspects of its life may continue without disturbance or question.

These three things which must always be present are the *Apostolic Faith*, the *Apostolic Tradition*, and the *Apostolic Mission*. By "Apostolic Faith", we mean the faith that the Apostles themselves received from Our Lord and by which they themselves lived.

In this context, by "Apostolic Tradition" we mean the act and process, the fact of the "handing over" of that Faith, that is, its transmission to others, such as to the new converts those Apostles made and the new Church congregations that they founded. Because this handing over requires authoritative witnesses to testify to the reality and work of Our Lord, and because Our Lord's sacramental presence with us

is part of that reality, this “handing over” also requires the “handing over” or delivery of the Apostolic Office so that the Church’s ministry can continue indefinitely and unquestionably into the future.

By “Apostolic Mission” we mean the commission Our Lord gave those Apostles to go out and preach and teach all nations and to convert them to faith in Him and to incorporate them into His Church. This is the imperative or drive to share that Faith with all the world for the purpose of bringing that world into a saving relationship with Him. No commission is likely to be fulfilled that is given only vaguely to a group so this commission is not only the general obligation of all who have been baptized, it is the express duty of those who have received the Church’s – and Our Lord’s --explicit commission by ordination to His ministry.

1. The Apostolic Faith is “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”^v or, as St. Vincent of Lehrins said, “that which has been believed always, everywhere, and by all”.

“[T]he things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”^{vi} Listen to what St. Paul is saying to St. Timothy here: the task of the Apostles and the men they called to assist them, and therefore the task of the men who have succeeded to their Office, is to tell the world “the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses”.

Nor are “these things” simply what Paul thought the world ought to hear. They are what Our Lord knew the world needed to hear because they are His “Good News”, they are the Gospel. When St. Peter addressed the crowd on the day of Pentecost,^{vii} he started with Joel’s prophecy of the *escaton* [**ESS-kah-tahn**], the last days, and linked that with the ministry, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ. So, too, when St. Stephen was haled before the Jewish High Priest to answer the false charges of blasphemy upon which he was murdered, he began with God’s epiphany to Abraham.^{viii} He then traced the history of salvation down through the Patriarchs and the Exodus from Egypt, the Hebrews’ triumphant entry into Caanan [**KEH-uh-nann**], and their subsequent constant rejection of the prophets sent to them by God to announce the coming of the Messiah, which was of course an implicit but unmistakable indictment of their treatment of John the Baptist and of Jesus.

This was the same message that all of the Apostles delivered to all of the Christians who had been placed in their charge and it is the same message that the Church still teaches today. Thus no matter how socially respectable or how historically impressive a given man's ecclesiastical credentials may be, he cannot, in the fullest sense, be considered to stand in the Apostolic Succession if he does not hold, practice, and teach that Apostolic Faith.

In our own day, we see all too many people who hold what were formerly unquestionably Church offices, who bear impressive titles that are attested by magnificent credentials, who flatly deny the necessity or even the validity of that "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints".^{ix} When someone contends that Christianity is merely one optional path to salvation, on a par with any other deistic or nondeistic religion or, indeed, with no religion at all – when someone will not even stand up and be counted for the Faith, let alone be ready to die for it as all but one of the Apostles did -- that person cannot in any real sense be considered a successor to those Apostles.

2. The authorized, orderly, and verifiable handing over of the Apostolic Office is one of the prime safeguards for the handing over of that Faith.

"[T]he things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, **the same commit thou to faithful men**, who shall be able to teach others also."^x

This same message of salvation is what Paul himself preached after his dramatic conversion.^{xi} However, in his case, because he had not been one of the original company of Jesus's followers, the leadership of the Church – the other Apostles – took the precaution of *verifying* that what Paul was teaching was the same as what they themselves were teaching.^{xii} To put it in the terms with which we are more familiar, Paul passed his Canonical Examinations in Dogmatics and Homiletics.

We can see from Paul's Letters that he, in his own turn, took to make sure that he selected and prepared men to follow him.^{xiii} Thus he writes to Titus: "This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders [i.e., priests and bishops] in every town as I directed you...."^{xiv}

It is not enough that someone presents himself to us and tells us that he is a deacon, or a priest, or a bishop. Nor is it enough that someone can produce a certificate, with signatures and seals, to back up his story. We have seen such

documents that attest to “facts” that never occurred or that were performed in untrustworthy and unacceptable ways. So before we can accept someone as having been ordained in the Apostolic Succession, we must have verifiable evidence that he actually was ordained, that his ordination was performed in the proper way, and that the person performing it was properly authorized to do so – *i.e.*, was himself a Bishop in the Apostolic Succession.

Of course, we have no difficulty obtaining these assurances when the ordination in question took place in our own church, in the churches of the Lambeth Communion prior to 1976, or in the Roman Catholic Church, or in one of the canonical Eastern Orthodox Church, or in the one legitimate Old Catholic Church.^{xv} Once someone leaves one of those bodies, however, he leaves the institutional constraints that help to assure regularity and validity and thereafter many such come to confuse license with liberty.

Thus the ecclesiastical actions of a particular man, who at an earlier stage of his life was a member of an unquestionably Apostolic church body, but who thereafter left that body, all too often quickly deteriorate into dubious and untrustworthy goings on.^{xvi} It is no wonder that one bishop once referred to such wanderers as “the feral clergy”. And very often, those who feel free to make up their own personal church jurisdictions also feel free to make up their own personal church doctrines as well. The only safeguard is when all proposed teachings are compared with the historic deposit of the Faith and verified as being consistent with that.

3. Yet it is not enough for a man personally to hold the proper beliefs and to have been ordained by a legitimate bishop. Office in the Church is not a personal candle, to be enjoyed in the privacy of one’s home; it must be used as a beacon on the hill, to enlighten the whole world.

“[T]he things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to **faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.**”^{xvii} Our Lord gathered to Himself his Apostles and Disciples, and taught them what He knew they needed to know, not just for their own personal edification.

He did so in order to mold the leadership that would first build up His Church and then take that Church, which is His Body, out into the world to complete His work of salvation. This strengthening of the body requires the Bishop, as the Apostle *pro tem.* in a particular place, to teach the members of the Church, both to

teach them the Church's true doctrine and practices and to teach them how to be evangelists for Christ.

As a fisherman must first net the fish, then land them on the shore or at a dock, and then process them, so, too, the members of the Church, once instructed by the Bishop, to go out, net the unbelievers, and land them on the Church's doorstep. Their "processing" after that is their instruction by the Bishop and his delegates in the reasons they should find the Christian Faith a persuasive answer to their needs – which we call "apologetics" – and in the details of the Faith, which we call "catechesis".

Thus when a man wears a purple shirt, and puts a grand title on his letterhead, but has no flock for which he cares, undertakes no missionary effort in this world, and most especially makes no effort to teach the Apostolic message, then we are entitled to ask, "In what way is this man a real successor of the Apostles?"

Conclusion:

In fact, there are three tests we should use whenever we encounter someone who claims to be part of the ordained ministry of the Church and these three tests are, in essence, simply the same three reasons that we have said the Church relies upon the Apostolic Succession.

First is the *Apostolic Faith*: Does this man teach the things St. Paul taught, "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints",^{xviii} the Faith preached by Saints Peter and Stephen, the Faith "that has been believed always, everywhere, and by all"?

Second is the *Apostolic Tradition*: Was the Apostolic ministry *handed over* to this man by a genuine successor to the Apostles? That is, was this man commissioned (that is, ordained) by a bishop who is generally recognized both himself to be a legitimate bishop in the Apostolic Succession and, at the time he ordained this man, to have been an officer of some real, subsisting portion of Christ's Church? This is what we call the "tangible succession", or hands laid upon the head of someone who laid hands upon the head of someone who... and so on. But in addition to that mere "tangible succession", was this man ordained on behalf of, and to serve, some genuine, visible Christian community, or was he ordained in name only simply as some sort of personal magic trick performed in someone's living room?^{xix}

Third is the *Apostolic Mission*: Was this man ordained for the actual purpose of performing the functions of the ministry and not just as some sort of personal honor or recognition? Does he preach, *teach*, and celebrate the sacraments for actual Christian people, no matter how few they may be in a missionary situation or how widely apart they may be spread over some territory, or does he content himself with saying private services for himself and his family in a chapel he has converted from his garage or woodshed?

Catholic Christians may only listen to the words of, and receive the official ministrations of, men who can pass these three tests.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister^{xx}
February 8, 2009.

ⁱ *Psalsms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ *Joshua 1: 1-9 (KJV)*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *II Timothy 2: 1-13 (KJV)*.

^{iv} *II Timothy 2: 2 (KJV)*.

^v *Jude 1: 3 (RSV)*.

^{vi} *II Timothy 2: 2 (KJV)*.

^{vii} *Acts 2: 14-36*.

^{viii} *Acts 7: 2-53*.

^{ix} *Jude 1: 3 (RSV)*.

^x *II Timothy 2: 2 (KJV)*.

^{xi} *Acts 9: 20*.

^{xii} *Acts 9: 27-29*.

^{xiii} *I Timothy 3: 13; Titus 1: 5-14*.

^{xiv} *Titus 1: 5 (RSV)*.

^{xv} Prior to 2002, this was the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht. In that year, however, the European national churches of that Union, which had already gone into heresy, ejected from membership the sole national church that had remained orthodox, the U.S.-based Polish National Catholic Church. Thus the PNCC and its overseas branches are the only surviving Old Catholic bodies that can be considered legitimate.

^{xvi} Sometimes valid actions and invalid ones occur even in connection with one service of ordination or consecration. An example, which also illustrates how erratic a bishop may be when removed from the matrix of his home church organization, occurred in 1981, in San Diego, CA. Then the U.S.-based missionary bishop of the Philippine Independent Catholic

Church, the Rt. Rev. Francisco J. Pagtakhan, and two of his Philippine colleagues consecrated the Rt. Rev. G. Wayne Craig, the Rt. Rev. Ogden Miller, and the Rt. Rev. Robert Q. Kennaugh as the first three bishops of a new, PICC-affiliated church jurisdiction named The Anglican Rite Jurisdiction of the Americas. That service was videotaped, quite unusually for that early date, and the tape shows that the entire consecration service and its associated Mass were conducted flawlessly so far as Bps. Craig, Miller, and Kennaugh were concerned.

However, the tape also shows that after the conclusion of the service, and just prior to the recessional hymn, several men vested as bishops, who had been sitting “in choir” as VIP observers, walked over into the chancel and knelt down before Bp. Pagtakhan and his two co-consecrators. All three Philippine bishops then laid hands on the heads of these men, saying only the one prayer from the Ordinal, “Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Bishop in the Church of God....” Then these men rose, resumed their places in the choir, and then the entire group, ARJA consecrands, PICC consecrators, and miscellaneous VIPs, processed out of the church. No sermon was preached to these “eleventh hour” participants, no Mass was said for their “new” ministries, no invocation was offered asking for God’s blessing on their “new” ministries, no complete consecration service was celebrated, and especially nothing was done to regularize the highly questionable prior ordinations as deacons and priests of most of them. Just the one prayer was said, after the ARJA consecration service had already concluded.

There is reason to believe that these last-minute additions to the service received signed and sealed “consecration certificates” from the PICC bishops, certificates which would “evidence” to the uninformed viewer that a complete and regular consecration service had been held. It is unquestioned that at least two of them, Walter Hollis Adams and the notorious Anthony Forbes Morton Clavier, ever after claimed, on the strength of that one prayer, to have been “conditionally consecrated by the PICC”.

^{xvii} *II Timothy 2: 2 (KJV).*

^{xviii} *Jude 1: 3 (RSV).*

^{xix} *These merely titular ordinations and consecrations, which do not include “titles of ordination” (actual cures of souls to which the ordinands are appointed and for the service of which they are ordained) are also called “ordinations absolute”.*

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