

+MARTIN SERMON CORPUS CHRISTI

Well it's great to be here in Eastbourne, the sunshine coast, which has delivered for us, and father thank you so much for the hospitality, for the joy and glory of music, and the use of your church and I was going to say facilities, that normally means something else at this stage., but the hospitality that will follow that you very kindly provided for us. And how marvellous it is that there should be two great pilgrimage destinations next to each other; Waitrose and the Church of God. And, of course, there is The Lamb as well so maybe that makes three. But it does seem to me to give us a good starting point for our reflections on this celebration of the gift to us of the Lord's own body and blood – *corpus et sanguis Christi*.

The story that we hear in Luke is about feeding people. And it is, of course, in the Christian tradition taken up into being a story that is much more about simply feeding, it's not just a trip to Waitrose or not having a Waitrose nearby. It's also about something that echoes profoundly from the pages of the Old Testament, the old Israel fed and dependent upon God for food and drink and nurture and sustenance and life. It's a story which is saying to us something about who Jesus is as the fulfilment of the hopes of Israel and from the very outset, from the very outset it tells us that this is contested territory. It is controversial; there will be debate about what is going on, it is right there; Jesus says to his disciples 'you give him something to eat' and they say back to him 'we've only got a few fish and loaves'. The issue of how the people of God are to be fed is contested from the outset. When John takes up this story and uses it in his gospel he widens the discussion and the debate, it then becomes the source of conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. And that conflict widens and deepens as we see across the Gospels those moments when eating and drinking take Jesus into territory of controversy. Why does he eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? Why do his disciples not fast like the disciples of John do? Why does he allow, at a meal of a Pharisee, a woman to touch him, to anoint him and to bathe his feet?

Yes, the whole business of eating and drinking is a contested area in the Gospels. And it is therefore not surprising that as we regard across the church's history and in our own day the wonder and amazement of the gift of the Eucharist. To us, the new Israel, it is perhaps not surprising that we also find that the atmosphere of contention hovers around this experience. It is perhaps a statement of the human condition, of our capacity to rebel, to be hard-hearted, to be doubting when God asks us simply to rejoice and give thanks. And in our own church and in our own day and for many of us here today the issue will be about what we call sacramental assurance; how can we be assured of what it is that happens in this amazing forum where the church is assembled and becomes herself in the very processes of celebrating the Eucharist? How are we able to continue to recognise what we believe we have been given and commanded in this respect? And this sense of something contested is very clear in Jesus' own experience as I've suggested but also in the whole area of the mystery of his life and identity.

Mark in his gospel draws the discussion of authority into the era, the moment of Jesus's ministry when, having entered the temple and cleansed it, he goes back to Jerusalem and the chief priests the scribes and the elders approach him, in Mark 11. And in verse 28 they say to him 'by what authority are you doing these things?'. By what authority? And for many of us that is a familiar question. By what authority does our church make decisions about life, faith, order? In that context Jesus turns the tables on those who seek to entrap him and asks them instead for a response to what John the Baptist had been doing. What was his authority? And, of course, chief priests, scribes and elders realise they are in dangerous territory. If we say it was simply a human thing, a passing

fashion, a whim, we will lose our credibility with the people who thought he was a prophet and believed he was of God. If we say his authority was from God then we undermine our own position. Fear enters in, internal politics takes over and paralyses the chief priests, scribes and elders and they are unable to give reply. Jesus has put his finger very accurately on the one thing that matters in connection with authority; and it is authenticity. That's the question he was asking: is John authentic or isn't he? And, of course, it was evident, uncomfortably evident to the chief priests, scribes and elders that probably he was.

As we face this question; by what authority? We recognise that it opens up for us the whole contested area of the Eucharist itself, the nature of baptism as we heard in the ministry of John that transformative ordinance by which we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection and it's also a question which is not in any way one that we can simply use to challenge others but must challenge us too.

When recently I was present in York Minster at the consecration and episcopal ordination of the first woman bishop, Libby Lane, in our provinces of York and Canterbury, an ordination in which I took no part in the laying on of hands, by mutual agreement and recognition. But what struck me very clearly as we entered the great and amazing, wonderful building of York Minster, what struck me very clearly as the mandate from the Queen's supreme governor was read, as the huge number of bishops assembled with the Archbishop for this most solemn of actions in any case and especially in this one, what confronted me most there was the question; Martin, by what authority do you withdraw your participation at the moment of the laying on of hands? By what authority do you stand against the mandate of the sovereign, the intention of the Archbishop, all the lawful processes of our church duly assembled in that place? And the answer, of course, is by the authority of the general synod expressed by House of Bishops declaration itself, one of the instruments of governance for our church, which sees that we are a people who hold within our companionship a vital range of viewpoints, none of which can be used to discredit or excommunicate another. And here is the context in which we now live. One in which our church says to us and of us 'these are our brothers and sisters' and one in which we also say to and of those with whom we disagree on this most profound issue about the authority of holy order and sacramental assurance, 'these too are our brothers and sisters' for first and foremost our vocation is to seek that quality of authentic life in Christ which is always revealed by charity, by hope and joy and faith and above all, charity, again and again: charity but not compromise to theological conscience, and what might that mean for us in this diocese of Chichester.

I want, at the risk of delaying you perhaps longer than one might normally in a sermon at evensong at four o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, want to delay you a little longer by a brief, I hope, reflection and investigation into our history of this diocese. I want to take you back – not that any of us were there – to the late 17th century. I want to take you to one of my predecessors, John Lake, who I like very much. His portrait hangs on the stairs for everybody to see in Chichester. He was Bishop of Chichester from 1685 to 1689. Like the saintly predecessor, Richard, whose prayer, so well-known to us, was actually a statement from his deathbed as he was handed the crucifix and said 'Thanks be to thee my Lord Jesus Christ' and so the prayer went on. So these words were written by John Lake, in an era of our church when controversy, contested authority, questions about the nature of our sacramental life, relationships with other Christian influences: puritan, Quaker, papist – also threatened and disturbed the life of the established church. On his deathbed in 1689, John Lake wrote this:

'Being called by a sick and I think dying bed, and the good hand of God upon me in it, to take the last and best viaticum, the sacrament of my dear Lord's body and blood, I feel myself obliged to make

this short recognition and confession, that whereas I was baptised into the religion of the Church of England and suckled it in with my milk, I have constantly adhered to it through the whole course of my life and now if it so be the will of God, I shall die it.'

But he was a non-juror who had been suspended from office and died before he could be deprived of his See. He spoke of the non-resistance and passive obedience that are characteristic of the breadth of tolerance within the Church of England. He bequeaths, he says, the words of a dying man who is now engaged in the most sacred act of conversing with God in this world and for ought he knows to the contrary appear with these very words, the words of refusal, in his mouth at the dreadful tribunal on the day of judgment.

Here was a Bishop of this diocese, a scholar-Bishop who had remained loyal to the monarchist cause through the civil war, a person of huge devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, that wonderful phrase that he takes the last and best viaticum, the sacrament of my Lord's body and blood. A person who insisted at a time of general decline and neglect, that in the Cathedral Church, the Holy Communion service must be celebrated at least weekly. A person who insisted in the Cathedral Church that the pulpit should be removed from the choir where it was not in a place with adequate space for proclaiming the Word of God to those who needed to hear it and it should be moved to the nave. A priest and bishop of immense devotion; of huge evangelistic zeal; a profound conscience and who died before God in the strength of that conscience but with these words of humility, that the conscience – the very refusal – might be in his mouth on the dreadful day of judgment at the tribunal, saying effectively, I could be wrong, but here I stand, ready to be judged.

This example speaks powerfully to me about how together in this diocese and in the Church of England we might live and flourish. As those who represent a strand of something vital to our church's life, history and identity without which the Church of England would be herself, diminished. With which she is enriched and through which we are nurtured sacramentally, sustained collectively, corporately in our hopes, our witness, our discipleship, our evangelism and invited to contribute from within our own tradition to the life of which we are a part in these two provinces.

Briefly and finally then what might that mean for us? Some things I want to draw out: from the example of John Lake; as somebody who predates the Oxford Movement but reflects so much of what those reformers were seeking to revitalise; first, our respect and recognition of the place and wisdom of scholarship, of learning, of immersion in the theological riches of everything that has shaped and formed the Christian inheritance of which we are a part, to which we refer in the declaration of assent whenever a priest is licensed. These are the things from which the Church of England at her reformation has never departed: the Catholic creeds, the teachings and the councils of the first five centuries. These are the things that we hold in common with Christendom universally. As traditional Catholics in the Church of England, I would like to perceive among us a recovery of huge respect and enthusiasm for this aspect of the life of our church.

In the last century before the war, it was said – and indeed it was true – that for the Feast of Corpus Christi at St Paul's Church in Oxford, for the procession of the host, the canopy was held over the Blessed Sacrament by four members of the university in priest's orders, all of whom held Doctors of Divinity. Eric Kemp was one of them, probably the shortest of them. It was a statement that that was something of the character of our self-understanding. Respect for, engagement in and promotion of the enterprise of theology: learned wisdom. That does not mean that every Anglo-Catholic needs a doctorate in theology: it does not. But it does mean that we should recognise, prize and expect to promote attention to this aspect of the life of our church and never should that be more so than in our praying for and nurturing of vocations to the priesthood.

For the task of enquiry into what constitutes our church, what is its authority? Derived first from Jesus Christ, mediated through the centuries of Christian teaching, rearticulated in the documents of our reform and practiced today in our formularies and instruments of governance. Priests who are well versed in this discipline are vital for us. Not to pursue arcane and strange areas of academic interest, but my brothers and sisters, to nurture in every Christian, the confidence of knowing our faith, in its doctrinal manifestations as that which emerges from the second area in which its vital we are energetic, imaginative and reengaged and that is the development of devotion. That which goes deep in hearts and minds, that which is practiced seriously, with discipline, daily. That's what John Lake wanted to see in the Cathedral Church in Chichester. That's what the expectation of some many of the reformers of the Oxford Movement were fascinated by. That's why we have redecorated our churches: not to make them look pretty, to make them promote devotion. To help us to love God and to worship God wherein alone is our only hope of salvation.

We have the record of perhaps the establishment of more religious communities in this diocese perhaps more than any other. Tragically now, none that were founded here still active within the diocese. A profound statement about devotional life. The work of J M Neal, astonishingly enriching devotion at a very early stage of the Oxford Movement. What did those religious founders see in that devotion? They saw that the beauty of worship, the visual imagery, the material quality of devotion, was not simply self-satisfaction for Christians. But the means by which, we are stimulated into the love of God and of neighbour. It's the foundation of our service to others.

I had the huge privilege of being a curate at St Peter's Plymouth where the first Sisters established after the reformation of the Church of England had worked. In 1849 during the cholera epidemic, Lydia Sellon and the Devenport sisters, facing death every day as they tended the dying, looked after the bereaved, cared for the orphaned, they went to the vicar, Fr. Prin , and said: 'We faced death; we should be fortified by receiving Holy Communion', and so in the crisis of that epidemic, the daily mass was started again in the Church of England, after the reformation for the first time and has never ceased to be celebrated in that parish to this day.

Devotion is what leads us to service of others in whatever ways are appropriate for today's world and needs. The fostering of priests for service in the church, in a context that recovers respect for, promotion of, attention to study, theology, the foundation of our doctrine. Devotion to God who mediates and reveals himself to us in a wide variety of ways. It is, as we heard in the first lesson, the simple who love wisdom. This isn't just for clever people by any means. And where does devotion lead us? Into deeper love of God which compels us to the need of the poorest, the most neglected, the marginalised, the under privileged, the unattractive. In these three ways we are called to revitalise what is true and characteristic of our inheritance of faith as traditional Catholics in the Church of England.

And by way of conclusion if I might just point to some references that should encourage us in this respect. Some of you might have had one of these things, this is very dog-eared now, it has been on my study wall in a variety of places for most of my adult life, you'll recognise these words, they articulate something I think of what I've been trying to say, more succinctly and perhaps far more eloquently. They are the words from Frank Weston's address, Our Present Duty, given in 1923 at the Anglo-Catholic congress and he said: 'You are Christians, then your Lord is one and the same with Jesus on the throne of his glory, with Jesus in his blessed sacrament, with Jesus received into your hearts in communion, with Jesus who is mystically with you as you pray and with Jesus enshrined in the hearts and bodies of his brothers and sisters, up and down the world. Now, go out into the highways and hedges and look for Jesus in the ragged and naked, in the oppressed and sweated, in those who have lost hope and in those who are struggling to make good. Look for Jesus in them. And

when you find him, gird yourselves with his towel of fellowship and wash his feet in the person of his brethren.'

That, I believe, is Anglo-Catholicism at its best and most vital and how it is needed in our church today. A contribution that complements some of the necessarily perhaps, contemporary expressions of Christian evangelism: Messy Church and Café Church and other things not to be despised, but where do these things touch our doctrine, our devotion, our discipleship. Here as we engage with Jesus, here as we recognise in him that our authority comes from both within our own tradition as Anglican Catholics and is also met and echoed and can never be separated from our place as those who have the hope for the unity of Christendom. Yes, we will also remind our church that that is the Lord's intention for all Christians and we will remind our church that we can never be wholly and fully ourselves as Christians until that goal is achieved. And the rock from which we have been hewn, the Western Church, is one which we are invited again and again to find the gift of unity. And I commend to you this call from Pope Francis: 'It is about the joy of the gospel, yet another of the hallmarks that must be ours as we are released from care and anxiety, from contention and fear. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel, he says this: 'I invite all Christians, not just Roman Catholics, all Christians, you and me, I invite all Christians everywhere, at this very moment to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them. And I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day.'

May his call to the joy of the gospel resonate in our hearts and may we be those who ensure that it is a call to unity in the joy of that gospel that is heard within our own church. For only in the unity of Christendom that is fully apostolic, truly Catholic, can our authenticity come to its fullest expression. These are some of the things which I hope and believe are to be found within our strategy for growth in this diocese, our commitment to Know, Love, Follow Jesus. I was thrilled to discover that we printed 10,000 copies of the Gospel of Luke. This is your story my brothers and sisters, this is the story of the birth of Jesus Christ, the annunciation to the Blessed Virgin, the hopes of heaven, the institution of the Eucharist, the gift of Baptism: this is our story and I am delighted to discover that 10,000 of these have been given away and there is request for more.

May we be confident, energetic and noted for sharing our faith in this manner. For it is Jesus who calls us to it, who calls us to be authentically his signs, joyfully the voice of his gospel, may the gift of his Holy Spirit make it happen in us today.

Amen.