

The life of God

CRACKED WIDE OPEN

Diocesan Lent Course 2021

in the paschal mystery

The suffering, death, resurrection
and glorification of Jesus

Diocese of Chichester Lent Course 2021

Week One
Background Reading

Background reading

From *TCTCV*:

52. The Church, as the body of Christ and the eschatological people of God, is built up by the Holy Spirit through a diversity of gifts or ministries. This diversity calls for a ministry of co-ordination so that these gifts may enrich the whole Church, its unity and mission. The faithful exercise of the ministry of *episkopé* under the Gospel by persons chosen and set aside for such ministry is a requirement of fundamental importance for the Church's life and mission. The specific development of structures of *episkopé* varied in different times and places; but all communities, whether episcopally ordered or not, continued to see the need for a ministry of *episkopé*. In every case *episkopé* is in the service of maintaining continuity in apostolic faith and unity of life. In addition to preaching the Word and celebrating the Sacraments, a principal purpose of this ministry is faithfully to safeguard and hand on revealed truth, to hold the local congregations in communion, to give mutual support and to lead in witnessing to the Gospel. Such guidance includes the oversight of the various Christian service organizations dedicated to bettering human life and to the relief of suffering, aspects of the Church's service (*diakonia*) to the world to which we will return in the next chapter. All these functions, summed

up in the term *episkopé* or oversight, are exercised by persons who relate to the faithful of their own communities as well as to those who exercise such a ministry in other local communities. This is what it means to affirm that the ministry of oversight, as all ministry in the Church, needs to be exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways. These ways of exercise have been succinctly described in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry as follows: "It should be personal, because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should also be collegial, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a communal dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community's effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit."

53. One such exercise of oversight reflects that quality of the Church

which might be termed “synodality” or “conciliarity.” The word synod comes from the Greek terms *syn* (with) and *odos* (way) suggesting a “walking together.” Both synodality and conciliarity signify that “each member of the Body of Christ, by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility” in the communion of the church. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the whole Church is synodal/ conciliar, at all levels of ecclesial life: local, regional and universal. The quality of synodality or conciliarity reflects the mystery of the Trinitarian life of God, and the structures of the Church express this quality so as to actualize the community’s life as a communion. In the local eucharistic community, this quality is experienced in the profound unity in love and truth between the members and their presiding minister. In crucial situations synods have come together to discern the apostolic faith in response to doctrinal or moral dangers or heresies, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to send after his return to the Father (cf. John 16:7.12-14). Ecumenical synods enjoyed the participation of leaders from the entire Church; their decisions were received by all as an acknowledgment of the important service they played in fostering and

maintaining communion throughout the Church as a whole. The churches currently have different views and practices about the participation and role of the laity in synods.

The authority of Ecumenical

Councils

While most churches accept the doctrinal definitions of the early Ecumenical Councils as expressive of the teaching of the New Testament, some maintain that all post-biblical doctrinal decisions are open to revision, while others consider some doctrinal definitions to be normative and therefore irrefrangible expressions of the faith. (Note: the Preface to the Declaration of Faith quoted in the introductory material clearly states that the Church of England proclaims the faith set forth in the Creeds. The Creeds are the result of some of these early Councils.)

Has ecumenical dialogue
made possible a common
assessment of the
normativity of the teaching of
the early Ecumenical
Councils?

54. Wherever the Church comes together to take counsel and make important decisions, there is need for someone to summon and preside over the gathering for the sake of good order and to facilitate the process of promoting, discerning and articulating consensus. Those who preside are always to be at the service of those among whom they preside for the edification of the Church of God, in love and truth. It is the duty of the ones who preside to respect the integrity of local churches, to give voice to the voiceless and to uphold unity in diversity.

55. The word primacy refers to the custom and use, already recognized by the first ecumenical councils as an ancient practice, whereby the bishops of Alexandria, Rome and Antioch, and later Jerusalem and Constantinople, exercised a personal ministry of oversight over an area much wider

than that of their individual ecclesiastical provinces. Such primatial oversight was not seen as opposed to synodality/conciliarity, which expresses more the collegial service to unity. Historically, forms of primacy have existed at various levels. According to canon 34 of the Apostolic Canons, which is expressive of the Church's self-understanding in the early centuries and is still held in honour by many, though not all, Christians today, the first among the bishops in each nation would only make a decision in agreement with the other bishops and the latter would make no important decision without the agreement of the first. Even in the early centuries, the various ministries of primacy were plagued at times by competition between Church leaders. A primacy of decision-making (jurisdiction) and teaching authority, extending to the whole people of God, was gradually claimed by the Bishop of Rome on the basis of the relation of that local church to the apostles Peter and Paul. While acknowledged by many churches in the early centuries, its essential role and manner of exercise were matters of significant controversy. In recent years, the ecumenical movement has helped to create a more conciliatory climate in which a ministry in service to the unity of the whole Church has been discussed.

56. Partly because of the progress already recorded in bilateral and

multilateral dialogues, the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order raised the question “of a universal ministry of Christian unity.” In his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (That All May be One), Pope John Paul II quoted this text when he invited Church leaders and their theologians to “enter into patient and fraternal dialogue” with him concerning this ministry. (See in particular the footnote concerning this on page 31 of TCTCV). In subsequent discussion, despite continuing areas of disagreement, some members of other churches have expressed an openness to considering how such a ministry might foster the unity of local churches throughout the world and promote, not endanger, the distinctive features of their witness. Given the ecumenical sensitivity of this issue, it is important to distinguish between the essence of a ministry of primacy and any particular ways in which it has been or is currently being exercised. All would agree that any such personal primatial ministry would need to be exercised in communal and collegial ways.

57. There is still much work to be done to arrive at a convergence on this topic. At present Christians do not agree that a universal ministry of primacy is necessary or even desirable, although several bilateral dialogues have acknowledged the value of a ministry in service to the unity of the whole Christian community or even that such a

ministry may be included in Christ’s will for his Church. The lack of agreement is not simply between certain families of churches but exists within some churches. There has been significant ecumenical discussion of New Testament evidence about a ministry serving the wider unity of the Church, such as those of St Peter or of St Paul. Nevertheless, disagreements remain about the significance of their ministries and what they may imply concerning God’s possible intention for some form of ministry in service to the unity and mission of the Church as a whole.

A universal ministry of unity

If, according to the will of Christ, current divisions are overcome, how might a ministry that fosters and promotes the unity of the Church at the universal level be understood and exercised?

Extracts from the Ordination and Consecration of a Bishop

After the greeting and introduction, the one presiding addresses the assembly as follows:

God calls his people to follow Christ, and forms us into a royal priesthood,

a holy nation, to declare the wonderful deeds of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. The Church is the Body of Christ, the people of God and the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. In baptism the whole Church is summoned to witness to God's love and to work for the coming of his kingdom. To serve this royal priesthood, God has given particular ministries. Bishops are ordained to be shepherds of Christ's flock and guardians of the faith of the apostles, proclaiming the gospel of God's kingdom and leading his people in mission. Obedient to the call of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, they are to gather God's people and celebrate with them the sacraments of the new covenant. Thus formed into a single communion of faith and love, the Church in each place and time is united with the Church in every place and time.

After the creed the bishop presiding says:

Bishops are called to serve and care for the flock of Christ. Mindful of the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for his sheep, they are to love and pray for those committed to their charge, knowing their people and being known by them. As principal ministers of word and sacrament, stewards of the mysteries of God, they are to preside at the Lord's table and to lead the offering of prayer and praise. They are to feed God's pilgrim

people, and so build up the Body of Christ. They are to baptize and confirm, nurturing God's people in the life of the Spirit and leading them in the way of holiness. They are to discern and foster the gifts of the Spirit in all who follow Christ, commissioning them to minister in his name. They are to preside over the ordination of deacons and priests, and join together in the ordination of bishops. As chief pastors, it is their duty to share with their fellow presbyters the oversight of the Church, speaking in the name of God and expounding the gospel of salvation. With the Shepherd's love, they are to be merciful, but with firmness; to minister discipline, but with compassion. They are to have a special care for the poor, the outcast and those who are in need. They are to seek out those who are lost and lead them home with rejoicing, declaring the absolution and forgiveness of sins to those who turn to Christ. Following the example of the prophets and the teaching of the apostles, they are to proclaim the gospel boldly, confront injustice and work for righteousness and peace in all the world.

The bishop presiding addresses the ordinand directly

N, we trust that you have weighed and pondered all this, and that you are now fully determined to devote yourself to this ministry to which God has called you.

We pray that you may offer to him your best powers of mind and spirit, so that as you follow the rule and teaching of our Lord you may grow up into his likeness, and sanctify the lives of all with whom you have to do.

The ordination prayer

We praise and glorify you, almighty Father, because in your infinite love you have formed throughout the world a holy people for your own possession, a royal priesthood, a universal Church.

We praise and glorify you because you have given us your only Son Jesus Christ, the image of your eternal and invisible glory, the firstborn of all creation and head of the Church.

We praise and glorify you that by his death he has overcome death; and that, having ascended into heaven, he poured out your Holy Spirit upon his disciples, to give them power to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth and to build up your people in love.

And now we give you thanks that you have called this your servant, whom we ordain in your name, to share as a bishop in the ministry of the gospel of Christ, the Apostle and High Priest of our faith and the Shepherd of our souls.

Therefore, Father, through Christ our Lord we pray: Send down the Holy Spirit on your servant N for the office and work of a bishop in your Church. Through your Spirit, heavenly Father, fill this your servant with the grace and power which you gave to your apostles, that as a true shepherd *he/she* may feed and govern your flock, and lead them in proclaiming the gospel of your salvation in the world.

Make *him/her* steadfast as a guardian of the faith and sacraments, wise as a teacher and faithful in presiding at the worship of your people.

Through *him/her*, with *his/her* fellow servants in Christ, increase your Church and renew its ministry, uniting its members in a holy fellowship of truth and love.

Give *him/her* humility, that *he/she* may use *his/her* authority to heal, not to hurt; to build up, not to destroy. Defend *him/her* from all evil, that *he/she* may, as a faithful steward, be presented blameless with all your household and, at the last, enter your eternal joy, through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and your Holy Spirit, belong glory and honour, worship and praise, now and for ever.

Amen.

The extended Preface for the

Eucharistic prayer

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Christ is the Good Shepherd of the whole flock, for which the Holy Spirit ordains bishops to govern the Church bought by the blood of the eternal covenant. In this joyful community of faith, your people, filled with the gifts of the Spirit, assemble together in one communion of love. Here the gospel is set forth and fulfilled in the Supper of the Lord to make your Church a sign of love and unity for all.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying.