

Growing in knowledge of each other

Homily on Jeremiah 33 and Acts 2 – 50th Anniversary of the Anglican Centre in Rome

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Saint James Cathedral, Chicago, Illinois
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The Right Reverend Jeffrey Lee, Bishop of Chicago
The Most Reverend Sir David Moxon and the Most Reverend Barnabas Ntahoturi
together with the Right Reverend Bishops and Esteemed Governors of the Anglican
Centre in Rome
The Very Reverend Dominic Barrington, Dean of Saint James Cathedral
The Very Reverend Gregory Sackowicz, Rector of Holy Name Cathedral
The Reverend Canons, Priests and Deacons of the Diocese of Chicago
My dear Friends in Christ:

It was approximately 40 years ago that Lord Ramsey, the 100th Archbishop of
Canterbury, visited Chicago and preached at a magnificent liturgy at the Church of the
Ascension, where he spoke about his experience of Pope Paul VI. I attended this event.
As I was a seminarian, not yet a candidate for holy orders, I had hoped to sit in one of
the back pews so I could be inconspicuous. It was then that I learned an important
truth about what we share in common. Anglicans like the back pews as much as
Roman Catholics! From my less inconspicuous pew, quite close to the front of the nave,
I was able to hear the first-hand experiences of the Archbishop of Canterbury's
encounter with the Bishop of Rome only a decade earlier, when they signed an historic
common declaration at Saint Paul outside the Walls. In their declaration, they stated
their resolve to begin "a new stage in the development of fraternal relations, based

upon Christian charity, and of sincere efforts to remove the causes of conflict and to re-establish unity.”¹

Today, we gather and look back to those early days of the Catholic Church’s entrance into the already existing ecumenical movement. This was a movement of only about 50 years, the same age as the Anglican Centre this year, which was finding its traction. Indeed, the modern ecumenical movement owed its existence, in large measure, to a deep Anglican conviction of its necessity as an instrument for fostering unity. The Anglican Centre is another instrument which seeks to respond to that necessity especially by carrying out the charter given in that joint declaration, to remove the causes of conflict and to re-establish unity, through the development of fraternal relations based on Christian charity. This is what I hope to reflect on with you in my sermon tonight.

An imperative of the Christian life

High above the altar in one of the chapels of Mundelein Seminary, where Father Sackowicz and I studied, and I now teach, is inscribed *Caritas Christi Urget Nos* (“The love of Christ compels us”). This inscription is surrounded by stained glass windows of deacons of the Church, for it is certainly self-giving service which Christ’s love urges us towards. I would argue (see, I’ve just revealed that I am a professor of theology – that’s what we do, argue) . . . I would argue that one of our principle problems ecumenically

¹ Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey, *Common Declaration* (March 24, 1966). http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19660324_paul-vi-ramsey_en.html Accessed April 24, 2017

is that we have been satisfied with being urged only so far. We agree that the love of Christ compels us, but then we take control of the predicate of the sentence, just to be sure we are not urged too far out of our comfort zone. It is for this reason that Dean Barrington and I settled on the two lessons which I want to explore with you tonight. The first is suggested in one of the Anglican rite offices. The second is the text that I use to teach seminarians the three fonts of full communion: unity in faith, sacramental life, and ecclesiastical *koinonia*. But there is a third text which unites the other two. It's Matthew 28. Since neither the Roman nor Anglican rite read a gospel at Evening Prayer, the Dean selected the closing hymn as a summation. I hope you are realizing that this sermon is itself a product of ecumenical dialogue. From here on, however, Dean Barrington is not responsible for anything I say.

Sacra Pagina

My former colleague, Robert Barron, priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago and now auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles, in his work on Thomas Aquinas, notes that the work of theology is essentially the elaboration of the sacred page.² Thomas, as you might know, spent the first phase of his religious formation in the Benedictine Monastery of Monte Cassino. The Benedictine approach to the Christian life, which also provides at the foundation for so much of Anglicanism, saw the regular and orderly reading of the Scriptures as the basis for theology. The sacred text is read, meditated upon, prayed over, and contemplated. *Lectio divina* informed preaching. Preaching was the context in

² See Robert Barron, *Catholicism, The Pivotal Players: Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Chicago: Word on Fire, 2016).

which the Fathers of the Church did their theology. This is how the Christian life is meant to be. Revelation grounds prayer, prayer grounds preaching, and preaching grounds elaboration in theology.

Acts 2:42 How it was meant to be

The Acts of the Apostles is, in one sense, a description of how the Church should be. It is radical and utopian and at the same time earthy and practical. As we read the description in the second chapter of Acts, the image that leaps to mind is not Saint James or Holy Name Cathedrals. Rather, the image is something more like an Israeli kibbutz. Or, less dramatic but more accurate, it's something like a Benedictine monastery, a place of *ora et labora* (prayer and work), which provides for a community life which is itself a witness to the world of the love of God.

Acts 2:42 is a text that set before us the criteria for Christian unity, that devotion to the teaching of the apostles, to the *koinonia*, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers, are the qualities which maintain the unity given in the one baptism.³

³ A careful reading of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles reveals that the original notion of the Church found in its pages suggests a reality which while founded progressively by the Logos from creation through is paschal mystery, nevertheless is a work of the Holy Spirit who breathe life into her, such that the Church emerges after Pentecost fully formed and already possessing all the gifts needed to accomplish the apostolic mission *ad gentes*. I mention this as it is contrary to the ordinary conception of the Church as "a voluntary association of like-minded individuals gathered together to promote the cause of Jesus", which is a description used by William Willimon to criticize the unbiblical notions so common today. To the ecumenist, and agreeing with Willimon, the text from Acts means that the essence of the Church is something prior to any individual, group or denomination. In a season when "like-mindedness" seems the sole criterion for affiliation, the Book of Acts teaches that the Word and Spirit of God through whom the world was made, also made us Christians, incorporating us into an ontological reality, i.e., the People of God and Body of Christ, even as the different churches and ecclesial communities stand in various degrees of continuity with the apostolic church. That reality is under the

Jeremiah 33:6-9 A vision for the renewal

The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah prophetically challenges us not to conceive ecumenism as a kind of negotiated settlement of religious differences, but as discernment of the will of God within salvation history.⁴ Most of all, it reminds us of the City of God of which Saint Augustine of Hippo wrote – a place of glory before all the nations.

Notice carefully, however, the progression in the text, and as I read it, hear what it says about Jerusalem and apply these prophetic words to the currently divided City of God. “Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security.” The abundance of the life of grace is limited in our current divided state. “I will rebuild them as they were at first.” This image is a memory of the time when the city was as God intended. Applied to Christian unity, it was the Church in the Acts of the Apostles, enjoying the abundance of the fruits of the Spirit and the bonds of *koinonia*. “I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.” We cannot progress in Christian unity without penance. We are not right with God so long as we dwell outside his will, which is for unity.

control of our individual wills about as much as creation is, which is to say, pretty much not at all. What is under our control is the willingness to mold our will to Christ’s. Like-mindedness is, in this sense, essential to church unity, but it achieved through spiritual conversion not diplomatic negotiation. This is the framework understood by the Prophet Jeremiah about the people of Israel, which is a type of the Church. See William H. Willimon, *What’s Right with the Church?* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985).
⁴ “⁶Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance^[a] of prosperity and security. ⁷I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. ⁸I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. ⁹And this city^[b] shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them; they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.” (RSV-Catholic Edition)

“And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. . .” Is that how the world sees the Church? Jeremiah 33 is a text that sets before us the important truth that the plan of God always intended us to be one. It also sets before us a challenge for we are not asked to merely know about unity, but to be united. To do God’s will requires an act of our will under grace. The first step is repentance. The Book of Common Prayer in its collect for Christian unity warns us “. . . to lay to heart the great danger we are in by our unhappy division. . .”⁵ We need to be converted out of the false notion that the current state of division is legitimate.

Matthew 28 Conversion, a hard word, a necessary honesty

This is why I wanted to draw our attention to Matthew 28. Listen to the text:

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”⁶

⁵ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal Publishing Corporation, 1979), 818.

⁶ Matthew 28:16-20 (RSV-Catholic Edition)

The Church Jesus founded is called by her founder to do specific things: to make disciples, to baptize and teach, and to dwell with the Lord who continues to be present in our midst, even as we await his second and glorious coming. Matthew 28 presupposed the other two texts. If the Church does not exhibit the characteristics described in Acts 2 she will not possess attractive power. If the Church does not exhibit the repentance and renewal called for in Jeremiah 33, she will not have the courage to extend herself to the nations. These three texts, then, are the conditions of the possibility of mission. Matthew 28 is the text which sets before us the motive for Christian unity and the demanding task which precedes it.

Continuity and friendship

The Anglican Centre in Rome has stated that its approach to ecumenism is praying together, talking together and celebrating together. In my experience, both in Rome and with the Friends of the Anglican Centre here in the United States, I know that you have been faithful to this vision. C. S. Lewis once wrote that the essential quality of friendship is continuity.⁷ I certainly think that this is a quality which I have seen in the American Friends of the Anglican Centre. Since Archbishop Michael Ramsey's historic visit until today, Anglicans throughout the world have displayed continuity in their engagement with the Church of Rome and her bishop. Today, as we celebrate this relationship together, it might be good to remind ourselves that corporate relationships

⁷ C. S. Lewis, "The Screwtape Letters" in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* (San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 175.

need institutions to actualize the friendship. The Anglican Centre in Rome is one such institution at the service of Christian unity.

A spiritual application

At the outset, I proposed that the three texts which Dean Barrington and I chose for this Evensong exposed the essence of the spiritual endeavor which is ecumenism. As I close, I want to offer a thought on application. One of the essential qualities mentioned in the Book of Acts is *koinonia*. As we gather here tonight, we all know that the present ethical issues of division are far more demanding than were the doctrinal issues of the past. While we have done exceptional work in the Anglican/Roman Catholic dialogues of the last fifty years, we also know that we are moving apart on some issues faster than we are coming together. This applies within our two communions as well as between our two communions. So, after reading these scriptures, I have a thought to share.

Archbishop Michael Ramsey and Pope Paul VI described the means towards Christian unity as the development of fraternal relations based upon Christian charity. During the Second Vatican Council, there was one concrete example of such charity. The observer delegates were seated in a gallery opposite the College of Cardinals. While having neither voice nor vote, their presence was a reminder to the Council Fathers that all of their deliberations would, in some way touch the relationship of the Catholic Church to other Christian communions. I would call this the charity of keeping each other in mind. The Anglican Centre in Rome, in its own way, continues

this witness and challenges Catholics to keep the Anglican Communion in mind, as we engage in our own church life. Might this be a spiritual practice which we might develop locally and nationally as a means to protecting the *koinonia* we share? Surely Bishop Lee's invitation to have a Roman Catholic deliver the sermon tonight is an example of just this spiritual practice. Can we do more to keep one another ever in mind? I offer this question as my conclusion.

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