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The Parish Paper

OF
ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Vol.39 No.13

The Third Sunday in Lent

02/24/08

THE LOGIC OF LENT--3 and DIOCEAN CONVENTION--2 (Unanswered questions)

THE LOGIC OF LENT - 3

In this Sunday, as on the last two, the gospel shows us Christ in conflict with demons, which are "the "enemies" mentioned in today's collect. In answer to our prayer to God to "stretch forth the right hand of his Majesty to be our defence" against them, Christ casts out a demon in today's gospel lesson "by the finger of God". He vindicates himself against the diabolical calumnies of his human enemies - Satan does not cast out Satan, only the Holy Spirit can drive out evil spirits - and draws the corollary: the soul set free from the lies of the devil must be filled with the truth of the word of God, lest it fall back into illusions, "and the last state of that man be worse than the first". From the destructive power of Satan's lies we can only be set free by the truth of the Word of God. That is really the point of today's gospel lesson. The epistle lesson applies it practically: "ye were once darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord, walk as children of light". The motif of Jesus' confrontation with his enemies and vindication against them acquires perspective in the story of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37-50). Moved by murderous envy and anger, they sold him into slavery into Egypt, and told his father that his son is dead. Joseph's eventual exaltation, and his use of authority to save his family, foreshadows the saving death and resurrection of Christ.

DIOCESAN CONVENTION - 2

Unanswered Questions

Diocesan Convention in Augusta was uncontentious, but beneath its placid surface lurked a number of unanswered questions, which I list as follows, in no particular order. Item. The bishop asserted that his litigation against Christ Church was a matter of fiduciary duty, which, if left undone, might well land him in jail. No corroboration for this claim was offered. Item. He also disclosed that funds for the litigation against Christ Church are not coming from the regular budget (funded by parishes) but from funds available for the bishop's discretionary use. What these funds were, was not disclosed. The obvious question is whether the national church is funding the litigation. Item. A bishop from Uganda was in attendance (to speak to us about mission), but we were not told why we were in communion with this Ugandan bishop

when the clergy and people of Christ Church, now under another bishop of Uganda, are considered to have forsaken communion. Item. Nor was there any discussion of the wisdom of demonizing and marginalizing conservative dissent in the years since 2003, a practice which surely contributed to the loss of two large congregations and the embitterment of others. Item. Nor was there any discussion of the role of the presiding bishop in the Georgia controversies, although it is easy to guess. As the depositions she gave in the Virginia lawsuits confirm, Schori has taken upon herself the role of Chief Prosecutor of conservative dissent, seeking to crush parishes and dioceses that seek to leave the Episcopal Church by a campaign of threats, ecclesiastical inhibition and civil litigation. We must assume that she is playing a similar role in Georgia. Item. In addition to her role as Litigator-in-chief, she has had a leading role as a promoter of the "inclusive" agenda, and thus bears responsibility for the continuing impairment of communion within the Communion. Moreover, in her teaching she articulates a sub-credal version of Christian doctrine. She is to visit the diocese next September.

Finally, and not unexpectedly, the bishop announced the canonical process that will result in the election and consecration of his successor as Bishop of Georgia, perhaps 12 or 18 months from now. For all our disagreements, we have much for which to thank Bishop Louthit. He adheres to the catholic creeds, and his orders are recognized as valid by the whole Communion. By upholding, however minimally, the Windsor recommendations, he has allowed this diocese to remain within the Anglican Communion. He himself has of his own conviction upheld Anglican moral standards, by his vote not to confirm Gene Robinson, and by his refusal to permit the ordination or blessing of persons in same-sex relationships. He also permitted the convention to pass a canon forbidding the ordination of persons living outside the bounds of marriage or celibacy. He has respected the conscience of St. John's about worship and holy orders. I think he could have done more, but I am grateful for what he has done, and I trust will continue to do, for the remainder of his episcopate. Together with his wife Jan, he has been a friend of St. John's.

Naturally, much thought must be given to the question of who is to succeed him. Will the diocese choose someone loyal to the historic confessions of the faith? committed to uphold the Windsor recommendations? one whose episcopal orders will be recognized as valid by all Anglicans? respectful of conservative conscience? I don't know. And since the diocese may very well choose to answer these questions contrary to our conscience, we must ask another question: would the diocese be generous in providing alternative episcopal oversight for those who find themselves frozen out his (or her) election? Other voices in the diocese have pointed out, quite rightly, that the election of a new bishop is an appropriate time to have the needed discussion about the diocese can most effectively serve the mission that takes place in the congregations. Apart from some kind of consensual *modus vivendi* in matters of faith and worship, however, the mission of the diocese will be hobbled.

Whatever the outcome, I hope the diocese would elect someone who is able to undertake the task of rebuilding a consensual unity in faith and worship. This is just one of the challenges a new bishop must face, but surely a critical one. I do not know if that is possible: but I will pray for it until it is proved impossible.

The Rev'd Gavin G. Dunbar

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