

SERVICE OF ORDINATION AND CONSECRATION
of

The Rev'd Laish Boyd

Christ Church Cathedral

Nassau, The Bahamas

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Preached by

The Rt. Reverend Dr. the Honourable John Holder

Bishop of Barbados

Province of The West Indies.

2 Cor. 4:7 - We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us...

If today is seen as an important step along the path of your ministry, then, my brother Laish, it is a step leading to the type of challenges you have never experienced before.

Today, you will be ordained and consecrated as a Bishop in the Church of God. You will, by so doing embrace all the noble and revered traditions and the great expectations that are attached to this noble office.

They are traditions and expectations that are brim full of challenges. They are challenges posed by your own expectations, growth and development as chief pastor, they are challenges posed by the expectations of your clergy, and those posed by the expectations of the laity and the wider society, to name just a few.

You are being consecrated at a time when there are even greater challenges in the wider world. It seems as if the whole world is in a state of rewriting and redefining much of

what we have inherited and have held dear for a very long time. It is an exciting and challenging time to be alive. We are part of a dynamic process, a process to which we can make a significant contribution.

God is providing for you a great opportunity to make a special contribution to this process, to his Church and to his world. Grab this opportunity with both hands. It comes your way at a critical time in the history of our Church.

It is a time when your contribution will have to be related to the numerous questions being posed about the faith, especially as these relate to the other areas of human development. And there are a lot of questions.

It seems as if the old questions are being put under intense scrutiny, long before the new ones are in place. We are searching for answers to the new questions while we are still wrestling with many of the old ones. It is an exciting time to be alive, to be a Bishop in the Church of God. It is an exciting time to be a Bishop in this Province.

In the present state of theological and moral tensions that have embroiled the Anglican Communion, the questions will keep coming at you. Here is a sample of them:

*Given the developments we are witnessing in our Communion
and the world, what are the absolutes of the that
we must preserve?*

*Can we as Christians, indeed as Anglicans, stay anchored on
the absolute supported by the inherited tradition or should
we venture out in faith beyond these?*

*How far can we venture out without jeopardizing all that we
have inherited?*

These are only some of the questions with which you will have to wrestle as Bishop. There are other questions on the agenda that are being asked in a way they have never been posed before. Let me warn you not to fall into the bad habit of finding quick and ready made answers for them all, for there may be none.

These questions are being posed in an intense manner that is bringing a lot of pressure to bear upon the Communion. There are many who are wondering if the Communion will hold together beyond the next Lambeth Conference.

It seems as if the old solid sensible middle of the road approach that we have come to treasure as Anglicans is being ripped apart. It is being tugged to one side by the liberals and to the other side by the traditionalist and the conservatives.

For if the former group is convinced that there should be no restrictions on what they can place in the accepted theological and moral package the latter are declaring in no uncertain terms, that there are some things that can never ever qualify for entry.

I think that both sides can assume some positions and make some statements that suggest that somehow, contrary to all we have been taught, all we have believed, that God has invested this section of his Church in the hands of one small group, and they are the ones who will determine if it will survive or die. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Yes, we have our convictions for which we will struggle. We hold certain basic beliefs, basic understandings of the faith and we will not be forced to compromise or abandon them. But we cannot make the jump from this to a questionable position that we are the saviours of God's Church.

This Church is firmly in the hands of God as it was from the start. It has gone through crisis after crisis, far more intense than at present, and it still remains firmly in his hands of God. And it will continue to be there.

As bishops, we have our critical role to play as leaders of the Church. We must have a vision of where we ought to be heading. We must have the spiritual and intellectual resources to lead others there. But let us never ever believe for one moment that we are the ones and the only ones who hold the key to the future of God's Church in our hands, for we surely do not. We must never let go of the conviction of St Paul that:

the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us..

Sometimes we will come up against that dark glass through which we cannot see all we would like to see, but we know that this journey is one of faith, for we are often called to walk by faith rather than by sight. We step forward knowing that it is all in God's hands rather than ours.

As Bishop, as spiritual leader and guide, you will be called upon many times along the way to walk by faith rather than by sight. You will come up with your plans about the way forward, your vision of where your diocese should be heading and will work to implement them.

But as great as the plans may be, as dynamic and creative as your vision may be, as great as the response to them may be, there will still be the need to step out in faith. We step out never letting go of St. Paul's conviction that the transcendent power belongs to God.

But even as we walk by faith, like the generations before us, we must do so with the deep awareness that we are building on the past, trying to shape the present, and working to create the future. We are being given the opportunity by God to respond to the challenges of our day and to make a contribution to his Church and to his world.

In all this we need to have a pilgrim spirit and a pilgrim theology. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews can come to our assistance here. He grasped the need for a pilgrim

theology and a pilgrim perspective of the Christian life And so he can conclude in Ch. 13:14, that:

. . here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come

For the pilgrim sets out on a journey, travelling to a goal, a goal that is expected to provide an experience of God greater than he has ever had before. We are all pilgrims, my brother, on this journey to God.

As Bishop, live and minister with a deep sense of being a pilgrim. Preserve a sense of journey, for it will be a constant reminder that your focus is to be on the city which is to come.

This is not an excuse to ignore the issues of the day, but a reminder that any response to these issues must be placed in the wider perspective of the journey to the city which is to come.

You are advised to approach the issues with the bigger picture in mind. They must be related to the very purpose and goal of the journey. They must be understood from the perspective of the city to come. As bishop you must be the embodiment of this perspective, of this theology.

We dare not lose sight of this city, for if we do, then the one in which we now dwell may want to dictate to us on matters of our ministry. It may want to set our agenda, and decide for us how and when and to whom we proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. We journey towards the city which is to come obedient to Jesus our only Lord and master.

And as we journey, we have to cope with the challenges and the changes, some far more traumatic than others. We are witnessing many changes in our time. The old rigid moral lines and boundaries, slowly but surely, slipping into large bands of grey. There is much confusion about what is the Church's stand on a host of moral issues, the least not being the human sexuality Issues.

What we once took for granted is being put under intense pressure. There seems to be a weakening of a sense of responsibility to the wider community, and there is an emphasis on the rights of the individual to choose, even when that choice may be in conflict with the well established moral customs and traditions.

I will venture to say, that given the proximity of this diocese to our larger North American neighbours, where most of the traumatic changes seem to be taking place, the pressure may be far more intense for you than it is for us further to the south.

In a region washed by the tranquil and idyllic Caribbean sea on one side, and pressured by the Atlantic ocean on the other, we must search for a way forward between these two

cluster of contrasting experiences. We must learn to withstand the pressure from whatever quarter it may come, as we search for a way forward.

We have the spiritual and intellectual capacity in this Province to carve out a way forward that is captive to neither of the two camps mentioned. We need to engage in more discussion, more research, about this third way.

Coming out of a background of African slavery, that produced some of the most blatant moral contradictions that the Church in this region and elsewhere has ever had to face, contradictions that reflected an unprecedented level of human moral depravity, an experience that we survived, we can surely find in our past some models and insights to deal with the present bundle of moral contradictions emerging out of the human sexuality crisis. As you enter this leadership level of the Church in this Province we await your input.

How do you deal with all this as a young Bishop? Your diocese, the entire nation will be looking to you for guidance on some of these very complex moral issues.

Once you become a Bishop, you will be expected to pronounce instantly, and sensibly and profoundly on a wave of issues, if not on every issue. The press will be after you. You will be expected to provide the answers, even when you have not yet heard the questions, far less more study them.

I am sure this is built on a very faulty theology that suggests that Bishops are endowed with a larger portion of the Holy Spirit than others, but I am not sure that history or experience supports this.

When put under pressure to provide quick and easy answers, for the next news bulletin or the morning newspaper, be guided by the maxim, that there are no easy, ready-made answers to many of life's complex questions. Our Lord's ministry, set between the questions and the struggles of the wilderness, and the questions and the agony of Gethsemane, makes this profound point. That St. Mark could tell us that he died with a question on his lips only intensifies the theme of the absence of easy answers to the complex questions of life.

And searching for the answer is not a waste of time, and do not let anyone convince you that it is. Avoid the easy answers, find the courage to search.

But in spite of the questions and sometimes the scarcity of answers; in spite of the turbulence this can create, as Bishop and chief pastor you must be the anchor, compass and guide of the faithful in this diocese and indeed, the wider society.

These roles resonate well with those three pillars of Anglicanism - Tradition, Reason and Scripture. By being anchor, compass and guide, you will not be a book of answers to all the questions but the one to whom the questions can be addressed because you are not afraid to listen to the questions even if you have to search for some of the answers.

Do not be afraid to admit that you have to search. Anglicanism has always treasured the space to think and to search and research before we pronounce. Hence Reason is one of our theological pillars creating this space. Treasure this space. Treasure it and use it so that when you make a statement on an issue it will be one grounded in Scripture guided by Reason and influenced by Tradition.

In our world where information and news are driven by who gets it first, by an obsession with over exposure, and influenced by the instant solution and quick fix mentality, create some space for yourself. Do not let this fixation to know and hear it all about everything and everyone, invade and control your ministry, and indeed your life.

Preserve the Anglican treasure to think, to search and to research. Maintain some space for yourself to do these. You will need it as well to recharge your spiritual resources. (For we can all fall spiritually flat if we do not)

By so doing you will be in excellent company. The Gospels tell us of Our Lord in retreat on the mountain top, and having to find some space away from the crowd, a crowd that no doubt wanted him to solve all their problems instantly.

You like our Lord will need this space.

Being the anchor will also remind you that you have come into a rich heritage and there are some valuables, some family silver to be preserved. In this disposal age of built in

obsolescence it is very easy to fall prey to the belief, that there is little from yesterday that can help us to address and understand the issues of today.

Sometimes it seems as if we are all on a mad rush to make today all there is, and all there will be, and ignore the wisdom and traditions of yesterday only to our own peril. Do not, my brother, ignore the wisdom and the traditions of yesterday. Do not ever fall prey to that bit of folly that would lead you to behave as if it all began in your time, indeed, as if it all began with you.

Exercise your ministry as Bishop with a deep sense of continuity. It is a sense so well captured in St. Paul's response to some persons who wanted to place the achievements of yesterday, the work of today and the hopes of tomorrow all on his frail shoulders. And he had to put them right.

In response to this threat of overload St Paul responds:

*Paul only planted, while Appollos watered,
but it is God and God alone who gives the increase*

...to do some slight variations with the text.

Minister my brother with this profound Pauline understanding of ministry. Never ever lose sight of the fact that you have come into an inheritance, upon which you must build. Minister with a deep sense of continuity. Never forget that it is only God who can give the increase. Remember,

the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us..

So live with this sense on continuity. You have come into an inheritance. There are those who have planted and watered before your time. Make good use of this inheritance. For the inheritance is part of the anchor. And this part of the anchor is the wealth of the Anglican tradition. This is a tradition that is still one of the best understandings and application of Christianity. As Bishop you have to be able to grasp this tradition in such a way that it helps you to help others to understand it and use it.

In spite of all the turbulence, Anglicanism still remains one of the best expressions of the faith. We can be proud of this. Its depth and breadth can still function to provide an understanding of the link between God and his Church, God and his world, in a way that few other strands of Christianity can.

As Bishop, you will become one whose task will be to guard this inherited treasure; whose theology is as sound as its ritual is rich. We will all agree that development, change and relevance must remain to the fore as we move along; but do not change for changing sake.

We must never assume that all the common sense is in our generation and the previous ones were simply plodding along. That which has been tried and tested over many generations can still speak to us forcefully in our time.

The office of Bishop will catapult you, my brother, to a new status. It will be a good thing to be in your company once you are Bishop. Some persons will want others to know that they know you on a first name basis. Your presence can be used to legitimized things. There is no greater legitimizing agent than a Bishop, especially here in our region. It will be very tempting to fall for this. But watch it. Do not be tempted into accepting or supporting positions that can compromise your freedom to proclaim the Gospel boldly and to speak clearly on the issues in this society. Watch the company you keep.

Live and minister with a deep sense of humility. Do not allow the authority and the power that will be entrusted to you to make you forget, that like those whom you lead, you are frail and mortal in constant need of God's grace even as they are.

Live and minister with a deep awareness of your own frailty, for as St. Paul reminds us in our text:

We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us....

These earthen vessels will manifest a measure of weakness, but this weakness should be our constant reminder that the real power belongs to God.

Use the power and authority lent to you by God wisely. It will only be yours for a time. You are just passing through. It is not entrusted to you to secure your own position or to

create a protective shield around yourself. It is there to enable you to be the best possible experience of God's love and compassion for those whom you are called to pastor. Do not use this power to lord it over your fellows but rather to help them to grasp and experience the goodness of God.

Above all else, my brother, be a good Pastor and friend to your clergy. For them, be anchor, compass and guide. Be there for them when they encounter some turbulence in their lives or in their ministry. Help them to search for a way forward and finding that way, be their guide.

Hear them and listen to them even if this may be taxing at times. As you minister to the clergy, you will need to balance authority with compassion. It is not the same mix you would have used in your parish ministry. This mix is different.

It is different because there will be a connection between you and your clergy that does not exist between you and your parishioners. The clerical bonds that tie you together before your consecration will still be there when you become their Bishop. Treasure these bonds.

You will be called to make some decisions about your clergy that will stretch these bonds to breaking point. But treasure them. Do not be afraid to make your decisions as difficult as they may be, but treasure the bonds.

When all the pomp and ceremony of this consecration are over, and you are declared a Bishop in God's Church, take some time out as soon 'as possible to reflect on this courageous step that you have taken this day. You need to do so for it will help you to grasp the great responsibility that you have undertaken.

It is a great responsibility. It is a responsibility to which your diocese, the wider Church and the society will hold you accountable. Live and minister responsibly.

All that you say, all that you do from here onwards will be related to the office of Bishop that you hold. It will no longer be what 'Fr. Laish says', but what 'The Bishop says'. And what you say will be treated as what the Church says.

In spite of the heavy responsibility that comes with the office there will also be those moments of great satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment. You are being provided with the opportunity to make a special contribution to the Church in our Province.

There can be a deep sense of satisfaction in knowing that you can make a difference for good in the way this diocese, this province and indeed this country, develops. Work hard to be this difference.

Like the members of your Synod who elected you as their bishop, we have every confidence that you are capable of doing a wonderful job. This ministry to which you have been called, like that of St. Paul, can be compared to a treasure in an earthen vessel.

Our prayers are with out at this time, and will be for your entire ministry. May your ministry as a bishop be long and fruitful. May you be able to touch, and guide and heal ,many along the way. May you be able to strengthen hope and interest in the Christian way, within and without the Church. Remain humble.

And may the Grace and the love of God guide you every step of the way.

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