

BEING A EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE IN THE COMMUNITY

The Revd Father Adam J. Trent

The Revd Father Drew Darnell

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For the Orthodox Anglican Church to fully live into its role for the Great Commission we must all recognize that orthodoxy is incomplete without a determined mission ethos. That ethos must be rediscovered, reclaimed, and fused as part of our jurisdiction's very DNA moving forward. An understanding of what mission is, what it is not, and how we are going to accomplish it must be received and embraced by every baptized member of the Orthodox Anglican Church. Pope Benedict XVI has stated, "The rediscovery of the value of one's baptism is the basis of the missionary commitment of every Christian, because we see in the Gospel that he who lets himself be fascinated by Christ cannot do without witnessing the joy of following in his footsteps... we understand even more that, in virtue of baptism, we have an inherent missionary vocation."¹ As we dip our fingers into the font and make the sign of the cross as a reminder of our baptism we should also at that moment be reminded of our own missionary vocation.

Mission Simplified

Quite simply mission is taking Christ into the world. Archbishop Thomas Gordon has stated, "In the Orthodox Anglican Church we have a very simple way of reminding you of this fact. On much of our literature and websites you will see, *The Orthodox Anglican Church: Proclaiming Christ in Word and Sacrament.*"² What that means exactly for the sacramental centered missionary church as well as the parish church retooling for mission is something profound. To take Christ into the world means establishing a sacramental

¹ Pope Benedict XVI. "Angelus, 29 October 2006." *Vatican.VA*. October 29, 2006. https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20061029.html (accessed August 4, 2016).

² Archbishop Thomas Gordon. "Increase With The Increase of God." Hendersonville, June 25, 2016.

community in some geographical location for the purposes of introducing Christ to the people of that geographical location. It means being a Eucharistic presence for the community offering a constant, visible, and open opportunity to engage with the real presence of Jesus Christ at the very table where He is proclaimed, remembered, and celebrated whenever we gather. Being a Eucharistic presence is the central goal for Sacramental community formed for mission wherever one is established. It is through the Eucharistic liturgy that Christ is most closely engaged in the life of the believer and where the mission orientates itself around as a compass pointing the way for a people far from God.

Mission Flows From the Eucharist

Whenever we gather for the purposes of Eucharistic centered worship several things are happening. Among those is that we are reminded of the life we should be living in the world. Regarding the deacon in the liturgy for instance Bishop Keith Ackerman has said, “If you see a disconnect between what the deacon does at the altar and what he is doing in the world, the fault lies in the fact we are not doing in the world what God has called us to do”.³ Through the liturgy our lives are reoriented toward Christ. Through the prayers, profession, word, confession, absolution, communion, thanksgivings, sending and dismissal we are sent out refreshed for the mission we received at baptism. Namely to proclaim Christ to the world in both word and deed. We are instructed, encouraged, and empowered to take what we have just shared in the Eucharist out into the world in which we live our everyday lives. The importance of the regular celebration of the Eucharist to the mission church is evident. Archbishop Thomas Gordon also recently stated, “...the work of the church, the work of

³ Bishop Keith Ackerman, interview by Liturgical Moments. *Sacred Ministers* (July 31, 2013).

God's people, the work of the ministry is dependent upon God. It is supernatural. And so we stay with Christ, we feed on His Word, and we feed on His Body".⁴

Mission flows from the Sacraments because mission is about the Gospel, and in the Eucharistic liturgy the Gospel story is most fully experienced by the believer. For the Sacramental Community, the Eucharist is the primary place our common worship of God is lived out. For Anglicans it is indeed the common worship, as "held in common" for the people of God. It is the place we actively live out the visible evidence of our communion with one another, made possible by our communion with Jesus Christ. It is at the Eucharist that the communion of saints is experienced most as evidenced by our prayers for the whole church, and our profession of our common faith in the creeds said together in the Eucharistic liturgy. While our common worship centered around the Eucharist obviously benefits the community of faith, it also serves to benefit the world around us.

The Eucharistic Presence in the World

The sacramental community on mission with God as the Eucharistic presence in the midst of the world serves as the visible presence of the refuge offered by Christ. It is through the Church the Great Commission was given, and it is through the Church He determined it will be carried out. There are two parts to the Great Commission, Word and Sacrament. "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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20), We see here that mission through word (teaching) alone, does not fulfil

⁴ Archbishop Thomas Gordon. "Increase With The Increase of God." Hendersonville, June 25, 2016.

the Great Commission. There is also a Sacrament involved. The Sacrament of Baptism is the rite of entrance into the family of God and admission to the Eucharist. The outward focused Sacramental worshipping community understands its mission is to be the visible witness of Jesus Christ to the world around it. Its members are constantly looking for ways to invite others into the refuge the mission/parish represents.

Gospel Formation Within The Sacramental Community

The sacramental community within the context of its liturgical structure provides a place for discipleship to be cultivated and developed. At the heart of a sacramental community is the gospel. If it's true that we never outgrow the gospel (Col. 1:6, Romans 1:16), then we need our hearts to be shaped more and more by the reality of that good news. In Christian worship we are celebrating the gospel story. We are reminding ourselves of the truth of who we are and whose we are. We are "learning the language" of the gospel – becoming fluent in speaking it to ourselves and to others. A gospel-infused liturgy shapes us more fully into a gospel-centered people. And nowhere is that more evident than in the Eucharist. As Orthodox Anglicans, we proclaim Jesus through Word and Sacrament, helping create gospel-centered disciples.

It is through the liturgy but especially the Eucharist that we are able to grasp the good news of Jesus. We are able to understand the nature of our sin, the need for forgiveness, the offer of forgiveness, the offering of our Savior, and how we can personally commune with Him at the table. The Anglican liturgy in which the Eucharist is offered is a constant magnification of Christ. It's a constant pointing to Him in all of his glory. All worship, discipleship, and mission is centered around Christ and the good news. This is critical because

this is exactly what all people, both those within the church and outside the church need to hear and see and experience. As Pope Benedict stated, “How many people also in our time are in search of God, in search of Jesus and of his Church, in search of divine mercy, and are waiting for a "sign" that will touch their minds and their hearts! Today, as then, the Evangelist reminds us that the only "sign" is Jesus raised on the cross: Jesus who died and rose is the absolutely sufficient sign. Through him we can understand the truth about life and obtain salvation.”⁵

The Rhythm of a Sacramental Community

The sacramental community is God’s church. It is the gathering of His people as they worship together, grow as disciples, and are sent on mission. It is here, centered around the Eucharist that the parish or new mission church finds its focus, strength, and compulsion to grow as disciples and to live on mission. It is this pattern of worship, discipleship, and mission that creates a rhythm for the sacramental community that mimics a circle. As people worship God together and “feed on His Word”⁶ and “feed on His Body”⁷ they are shaped into gospel-centered disciples.

The gospel compels and the Eucharistic experience inspires all disciples to live a life of mission. Mission becomes a natural outpouring of a life of worship that is centered around the broken body and blood of our Savior, Jesus. Just as God’s people have experienced Jesus

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI "IV Sunday of Lent, 26 March 2006." *Vatican.VA*. March 26, 2006. http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20060326_parrocchia-roma.html (accessed 08 04, 2016).

⁶ (Archbishop Thomas Gordon 2016)

⁷ Ibid.

in the sacraments, they are now sent out in the highways and byways to be missionaries, compelling everyone to come to the feast so that they too can taste and see that the Lord is good. Archbishop Thomas Gordon says it best when he says, “Like the deliberate physical act of sticking fingers in the man’s ears, and spittle on his tongue, the sacraments are deliberate physical acts that allow God to bless us, to touch us, to love us.”⁸ That is what we invite people to: a direct encounter with God in the sacraments. The Eucharist becomes not just an insider experience but rather something that we want everyone to come and experience as well.

As people come to the sacramental community, they will be drawn in by God. Through baptism they will enter the life of the church and Christ. The Eucharist will be offered and they will feast on Jesus. They will be disciplined by the ministry of the sacramental community and will grow in grace as they become gospel-centered sacramental disciples. They too will be compelled by the gospel and inspired by the Eucharist to live their lives on mission, taking the Good news of Jesus to the world. The intent has never been to introduce people to Christ in order to add to our Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) numbers. We want to start and grow communities of disciples going out to make disciples, who go out to make disciples.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is the Sacramental community fully living into its responsibilities to the Great Commission where the fullest development of the disciple is possible. Fully participating in the Great Commission means taking both word and sacrament seriously and

⁸ Gordon, Archbishop Thomas. "Sacraments: The Healing Touch Of Jesus." Charlotte, September 7, 2014.

faithfully participating in both. The Eucharistic liturgy provides us that opportunity, and points us to the community necessary to develop as mature disciples empowered to participate as missionaries by virtue of our Baptism. The sacramental community serves as the Eucharistic presence to a world far from God. It invites the world as missionaries to come by way of Baptism to commune with them through our communion with Christ. It is through this community that the Holy Spirit encourages us, raises us up to maturity, equips us for service, and sends out empowered with the strength of Him, as He has prepared the way before us so that we should go out, and compel a world far from Him to come in. (Luke 14:23)

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