

Homily at Canterbury Cathedral on Sunday, October 2, 2016 on the occasion of the gathering of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission

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It is a great privilege to be invited to preach here this morning: the beauty of this place, the awe it invites, the splendour of its music, the spirit of its saints, the richness of its hospitality, the depth of its history. Thank you Dean Willis, Canon Christopher, staff and parishioners of Canterbury Cathedral for the tremendous welcome you have extended to the participants of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM). We are ever so grateful.

Today you celebrate the harvest, giving thanks for God's goodness shown through the natural world and the abundance of the fruits of the earth. The harvest display before the chair is a reminder of the splendour of the created world, the colour, the extravagant beauty, the blessing of being able to live well because God desires that we live and live well. God feeds us, gives us a home.

In the first reading from Deuteronomy (26:1-11) we hear the instruction, passed on through the generations, about giving thanks at the time of harvest. A person is to take some of the harvest, put it in a basket and give it to the priest to put before the altar of God, and say this prayer, which makes personal the story of the whole people of Israel: *My father was a wandering Aramean who went down into Egypt; there he became a great nation. Then note the switch from singular to plural. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, we cried to the Lord, who heard our voice and saw our affliction and brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; and he brought us to this place and gave us this land. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.*

It is a beautiful prayer of thanksgiving which we can make our own, for the harvest, the land which sustains us, for a home, and for God's faithfulness in time. It celebrates a gift which gives us life and makes of us (as it did for Israel) a people, a people called to live in gratitude.

In today's Gospel (Jn 6:25-35) we hear Jesus assuring us that God wants to feed us in a deeper way still, that God desires more for us than a good earthly life. God feeds us with his dreams for a future; feeds us with himself, to allow us to share in the divine life. Jesus tells his hearers, *do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, the bread of God which gives life to the world.* They said to him, *Sir, give us this bread always,* and he responds, *I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*

We who are gathered here today, Anglicans and Roman Catholics from around the world, are bound together by this conviction: we are a people who are fed by the Lord, who have put our trust in him. Our churches are bound together by gratitude for God's goodness to us; for God's feeding us on this planet, and in his word and sacraments, feeding us with his very self, that we might have life, and have it abundantly. We rejoice in being able to come together to give thanks.

But we also come mindful of some wounds, and I would mention three here this morning. The first of those wounds is that of the natural world, the environment, this planet. Just over a year ago, Pope Francis issued his Encyclical *Laudato Si', On Care for our Common Home*.

He noted that our world is “falling into serious disrepair” (61); that our way of living is contaminating the earth’s waters, its land and its air; that we are losing forests and woodlands, and stripping the world of its natural resources; and that our actions are now resulting in changes to the climate that, if unchecked, will have grave implications for future life here.

The situation is not without hope; “humanity”, he said, “still has the ability to work together in building our common home” (13), and God is with us as we do so. But an old Chinese saying comes to mind: *if you do not change direction, you are likely to end up where you are heading*. The challenge before us is urgent, and in prosperous nations such as this or as my own home of Canada, we bear a special responsibility. We are not living in a way which is sustainable; nor are we living in a way which can be replicated the world over.

This includes a responsibility towards future generations, as “the environment is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next” (159). Do we love our children and grandchildren, and their descendants, enough to value their future over our dysfunctional global systems and current ways of relating with the environment? Pope Francis states strongly that care for the environment “is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience”. The God revealed in Jesus Christ also speaks to us through the natural world; we are called to be in a relationship with the land which is holy and life-giving; such a relationship “is essential to a life of virtue” (111).

Pope Francis has extended an invitation, echoed by your own Archbishop Justin Welby, to engage in an open and honest conversation about our world, and about how we can learn to live on this earth in a way which is sustainable and life-giving for all.

If it is right to say that our common home is wounded, it is equally true to say that our relationship with each other, as people who live on this planet, is wounded. In our conversations yesterday we began to address some of the challenges facing us as Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops from 19 different regions across the planet. Some face the challenge of secularism and others the challenge of poverty; some the challenge of end of life issues and others persecution or war. We heard echoes of the human dimension of the environmental crisis, a subject which Pope Francis also addresses in *Laudato Si'*, where he speaks of increasing economic inequality that leaves billions of people in poverty; the fact that environmental degradation has a particularly negative impact on those who are poorest and most vulnerable; how many parts of the world no longer have access to safe drinking water; our culture’s throwaway mentality which devalues the natural world and human life.

While these wounds are increasingly gaping, Pope Francis suggests that we all too often we sweep difficult questions under the carpet, prioritizing short-term gain and private or national interests above the global common good, and treating issues of environmental concern or global poverty as an afterthought. Now is the time, he suggests, for honest and broad-ranging dialogue about how we can live together on this our home in a new, just and sustainable way. Now is the time for a

truly universal solidarity, as called forth by the Gospel. We human beings were made to live together as brothers and sisters; we are one people living in a common homeland and have a shared responsibility for others and for our world. We are grateful for those occasions when we have been able to address these wounds with a common voice and a joint outreach.

Finally, the relationship between our churches has been wounded, and as a result, our relationship with God is also wounded. And that is specifically what has drawn us together here, as it has drawn Anglicans and Roman Catholics together in various settings over the past 50 years. We have come to recognize that we hold so much in common: our “faith in God our Father, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit; our common baptism into Christ; our sharing of the Holy Scriptures, of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, the Chalcedonian definition, and the teaching of the Fathers; our common Christian inheritance for many centuries with its living traditions of liturgy, theology, spirituality and mission” (Common Declaration, Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Donald Coggan, 1977). We are also bound together by close friendships and deep affection. And yet we are still separated, and when we celebrate the Eucharist, we feel deeply the pain of that separation.

Today we are here celebrating the harvest with you, and we are trying to do some harvesting ourselves. We are trying to harvest the fruits of 50 years of dialogue about the issues which divide us. We are trying to harvest the fruits of recent generations of ecumenical efforts, in order to come increasingly to celebrate and give witness to our common faith, to engage in common prayer, to join together in the mission of the church, to act together to strengthen relations with our sisters and brothers in need, and to protect our common home. Please pray for us as we meet here and then in Rome in the coming days, and as we meet with and are commissioned by Archbishop Justin and Pope Francis to be artisans of reconciliation in our own contexts.

Yesterday at the Roman Catholic Eucharist we celebrated, we sang a 19th c. hymn of William Harry Turton which moved me deeply, and which serves well as a prayer to end these reflections:

O thou, who at thy Eucharist didst pray
that all thy Church might be forever one,
grant us at every Eucharist to say
with longing heart and soul, ‘thy will be done.’
O may we all one Bread, one Body be,
through this blest Sacrament of unity.

For all thy Church, O Lord, we intercede;
make thou our sad divisions soon to cease;
draw us the nearer each to each, we plead,
by drawing all to thee, O Prince of Peace;
thus may we all one Bread, one Body be,
through this blest Sacrament of unity.

We pray thee too for wanderers from thy fold;
O bring them back, good Shepherd of the sheep,
back to the faith which saints believed of old,
back to the Church which still that faith doth keep;
soon may we all one Bread, one Body be,
through this blest Sacrament of unity.

So, Lord, at length when sacraments shall cease,
may we be one with all thy Church above,
one with thy saints in one unbroken peace,
one with thy saints in one unbounded love;
more blessed still, in peace and love to be
one with the Trinity in Unity.