



Anglican Catholic Church



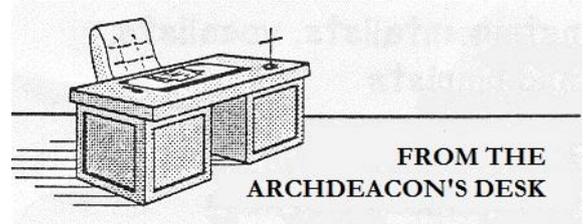
Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

August 2016

My dear friends and colleagues,

This time of the year is often known as the silly season by the media, who usually don't have much political news to report. Not so this year. The summer of 2016 can in no way be described as devoid of intense political drama. It has also been an incredible summer of sport, with so many Olympic achievements. But while the financial markets, Europe and Westminster may be full of uncertainty, the same cannot be said for The Faith. Our Gospel is unchanging and steadfast.



Perhaps, for some light relief, I might be forgiven for repeating this little story. The Anglican monk and liturgical scholar, Dom Gregory Dix (1901-52), recounts the following:

“It is an uncanny fact that there is still scarcely any subject on which the imagination of those outside the faith is more apt to surrender to the unrestrained nonsense of panic than that of what happens at the Catholic Eucharist. As a trivial instance, I remember that my own grandmother, a devout Wesleyan, believed to her dying day that at the Catholic mass the priest let a crab loose upon the altar, which it was his mysterious duty to prevent from crawling sideways into the view of the congregation. (Hence the gestures of the celebrant.) How she became possessed of this notion, or what she supposed eventually happened to the crustacean, I never discovered. But she affirmed with the utmost sincerity that she had once with her own eyes actually watched this horrible rite in progress; and there could be no doubt of the deplorable effect that solitary visit to a Roman Catholic church had had on her estimate of Catholics in general, though she was the soul of charity in all things else. To all suggestions that the mass might be intended as some sort of holy communion service she replied only with the wise and gentle pity of the fully informed for the ignorant.”

With every blessing

Fr. Raymond Thompson

Archdeacon



Mobile: 07443 438465 Email: fraythompson@gmail.com

Diocesan website: <http://www.anglicancatholic.org.uk/>

Email: diocesanoffice@anglicancatholic.org.uk

Why Are Priests Called Father?

Jesus said, “Do not call anyone on earth your father. Only one is your father, the One in heaven” (Mt 23:9). Taken literally, we would have to wonder why we do use this title “Father” when Jesus seems to forbid it. First, we must remember the context of the passage. Jesus is addressing the hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees – the learned religious leaders of Judaism. Our Lord takes them to task for not providing a good example; for creating onerous spiritual burdens for others with their various rules and regulations; for being haughty in exercising their office; and for promoting themselves by looking for places of honour, seeking marks of respect and wearing ostentatious symbols. Basically, the scribes and the Pharisees had forgotten that they were called to serve the Lord and those entrusted to their care with humility and a generous spirit.

In that context, Jesus says not to call anyone on earth by the title “Father” in the sense of acquiring for oneself an authority which rests with God and of forgetting the responsibility that goes with the title. No one must ever take the place of, or usurp the privileges and respect that belong to the heavenly Father. As Jesus said, only the heavenly Father is the true Father.

Our Lord Himself used the title “Father” for several characters in His parables: In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus the beggar, the rich man cries out from the depths of Hell, “Father Abraham, have pity on me” (Lk 16:19-31). If Jesus prohibited the use of the title “Father,” why does He instruct the people with a parable in which the characters use the title?

We call our male parent “father”, and clearly Our Lord did not intend to prohibit that. In a religious sense, those who serve the Lord and represent His authority, as a teacher, parent and especially a priest, must be mindful of exercising it diligently, humbly and courageously. To use this authority for self-aggrandizement is pure hypocrisy. Jesus said “Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, but whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”

Since the earliest times of the Church, we have used the title “Father” for religious leaders. Bishops, who are the shepherds of the local Church community and the authentic teachers of the faith, were given the title “Father”. St. Peter may well have been addressed as “Father Peter”, in that sense of spiritual father. The likelihood of that is supported by St. Paul who identifies himself as a spiritual father. In writing to the Corinthians, he said, “I am writing to you in this way not to shame you but to admonish you as my beloved children. Granted you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you have only one father. It was I who begot you in Christ Jesus through my preaching of the gospel. I beg you, then, be imitators of me. This is why I have sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful son in the Lord.” (1 Cor 4:14-17)

Until about the year 400, a bishop was called “father” (“papa”); this title then devolved solely to addressing the Bishop of Rome, the successor of St. Peter, and in English became “pope”. In an early form of his rule, St. Benedict designated the title to spiritual confessors, since they were the guardians of souls. Moreover, the word abbot is derived from the word abba, the Aramaic Hebrew word father, but in the very familiar sense of “daddy”. In the Middle Ages, the term “father” was used to address the mendicant friars – like the Franciscans and Dominicans – since by their preaching, teaching and charitable works they cared for the spiritual and physical needs of all of God's children. The heads of male religious communities are given the title “Father”. In the English speaking world, addressing all priests as “Father” has become customary.

Personally, the title for me is very humbling and I very much appreciate and value its use. As a priest, “Father” reminds me that I am entrusted by our Lord with a grave responsibility – His faithful people. Just as a father must nourish, instruct, challenge, correct, forgive, listen to and sustain his children, so must a priest do so for his spiritual children. The priest must provide them with the nourishment of our Lord through the sacraments. He must preach the Gospel with conviction, challenging all to continue on that path of conversion which leads to holiness. He must correct those who have erred, but with mercy and compassion. In the same spirit as the father with his prodigal son, the priest must reconcile sinners who have gone astray but seek a way back to God. As a father listens to his child, so must a priest listen to his spiritual children, providing counsel and advice.

All of us have a responsibility to pray for our priests, especially those that serve in our own diocese, that by God's grace they may strive to fulfil the responsibility of being “Father”.