

# Deanery Conference and Festival 2013

## An Introduction to Mission

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### 1 Why is mission often unpopular today?

To put it simply and without condemnation mission is unpopular today because of the effect of Protestant interpretations

Protestantism lays a more or less complete emphasis on the individual, and on an individual salvation manifested in immediate personal experience.

Such views show little or no awareness of history, ancient or modern; Salvation is in essence detached from the church, & not rooted in proper church ministry.

It is individualistic, so much so. that if an individual is out of line with another he can form a new 'church', call himself an apostle and make his own denomination.

Making disciples is paramount, the actual content of the Gospel less important its focal point is not the fulness of the church but another revival.

Exhibits upfront appeal but loses lots of people later due to banality & shallowness

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Private salvation  
Individual experience  
No sense of history  
Detached from the church  
Church ministry not necessary

**To recover the true meaning of the word mission we must go back**

- **to Christ and the Trinity,**
- **to the church as the place of true holiness,**
- **to liturgy and the priesthood**
- **and to the Kingdom which is to come**



The Trinity and Christ  
the Church and Holiness  
Liturgy and Priesthood  
The Kingdom which is to come

## 2 The Church the Place of True Holiness



I met a man Fr Sophrony.

The first time I met him he told me very simply and very quietly,

'the purpose of the Christian life is to ask Christ to send the Holy Spirit into our hearts so that he may cleanse our hearts and make us like Christ'.

There, in one sentence, is the complete Gospel; in a nutshell the whole of scripture.

There is a testimony to the entire work of God.

There is set forth the whole mission of Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and of the love of the Father towards each one of us, and for all of us together in the church.

Fr Sophrony lived the word himself and was sanctified by it. He thus testified that the church is the place of true holiness; and the place where the true word of Christ is alive and active.

Fr Sophrony's word was a direct, living word to a person; it gripped me like nothing else ever did and still does. From that moment my whole life was going to change.

The Gospel calls for change. Following Christ requires change. Change works the miracle of our union with Christ and our transformation in Christ.

Without change we cannot receive either Christ or the Holy Spirit, without change our heart cannot be cleansed, without change we cannot be made like Christ.

Mission must move us and our hearts: grip us and seize us with change.

We say Orthodoxy is unchanging.

It is unchanging because we participate in the unchanging life of the Trinity.

But there is another unchangeability, one sclerotic, strangulating, based on culture.

Mission is the ferment of the Word and it works change within the cultures of the world.

We in Britain don't live in Byzantium, we don't live in Constantinople, we don't live in Holy Russia. The word is not restricted by culture. We don't live within their rule of culture.

In Britain we live in a pocket size church where Orthodoxy hasn't been seen or heard for the last 1000 years. Are we going to give the people of Britain Holy Byzantium or Holy Russia?

Orthodoxy has been in this country for 1000 years (or so) We do not need to begin again; but in a sense we do have to begin again by getting to grips with the reality of the last 1000 years. We are a new generation amid many new generations.

**We must begin again with the Gospel, with true holiness, the living Word in our life.**

### **3 Mission begins in the liturgy.**



The Gifts are Life and they are Fire and we receive them in order to receive life and be set on fire, to be filled with his life and to be burnt with his fire.

Christ is our high priest; he stands before the altar in heaven, and we - all of us - stand with him before his altar on earth.

We are all priests. In union with him and in response to our heartfelt prayers he sends the Spirit. By doing so he trains and ordains us for mission.

The first thing he has to do is to cleanse our hearts, because as it is we are filthy and bound by the desires of the flesh.

We have to enter the cleansing, we have to let Christ penetrate the depths of our being, We have to persevere in the cleansing in the perfecting of faith, hope and love. This cleansing by the Holy Spirit brings about our effective union with Christ.

For mission, effective union with Christ is a necessity.

Without sanctification, we cannot be united to him,

without sanctification we are useless to him.

Without the illumination of the Spirit we cannot see the Kingdom.

Without living in the Kingdom we shall not see the universe transfigured.

The direct consequences of the liturgy are

**cleansing and change, sanctification and mission,**

#### **4 The Kingdom which is to come.**

The Liturgy gives us hope.

The Kingdom has come, it is given, it is present, largely unseen, in the world; but the liturgy raises our eyes to look for, even see, the Kingdom which is to come.

The Kingdom which is to come, as it comes down into time, changes the world. This dynamic of change introduced through the celebration of the liturgy is the agent of the End of the world.

Without this reality, our doctrine, sacraments and practice of holiness will become flat, too tied to the earth. Mission will be replaced by maintenance, i.e. just keeping things going. Maintenance will lead to the end to mission.

The Kingdom which is to come connects us with the fulfilment of all things, with the persons we shall be, in union with Christ, in communion with the saints.

Change is put into our mouths, into our hearts, every single time 'we do this' in remembrance of him. We live by the Gift that is eaten and never consumed.

When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ we receive what we cannot understand; Nevertheless the Body and Blood of Christ articulate for us, in an astonishingly clear way, what we are meant to be: persons full of him in body and in blood.

Through the liturgy Christ 'missionises' us.

We are all priests obliged to carry the Gospel in our hearts.

It is not an easy task, for we are obliged to die;

but we get into to dying and find that we are sanctified.

What's the problem? If we drink arsenic we die. If we drink the Gospel we also die.

In dying we discover the Kingdom!

## 5 More on the Holiness.

Orthodoxy can only be a lived faith and a living holiness. It cannot be learnt by any other means than in reality. The greatest danger today is intellectualism. We cannot know Christ by means of the intellect. We can only know him by the Holy Spirit - and the sign of that is the manifestation of unparalleled change in our lives.

The Orthodox church has an unrivalled tradition of holiness. In addition to the Fathers however, we also need a living father, - and if we cannot find a living father on earth, we must find one in heaven.

By 'living' is meant, someone who cares for us, who speaks to us, and who exemplifies the Gospel and teaches the one Living Tradition of holiness down the ages.

Do we want to take part in effective mission? Then make friends with a saint or saints. We will never regret it.

For some there is Metropolitan Anthony.  
Some go to Mt Athos - as another place to drink.  
Some to Mother Thekla.  
We can go to Greece, Cyprus, Russia, Romania, France -  
wherever we are plugged in, so to speak, to the Living Tradition

Some make the monastery at Tolleshunt Knights their home.  
But in one way or another, this matter is not an option.  
Whoever we are, we are obliged to nourish ourselves in a personal way.

This is in emphatic contradiction to the spirituality of today one which is cobbled together from here, there and everywhere;  
it requires no submission to anybody and is at no cost to the self .

If we are not properly plugged in to a living father,  
we may find our Orthodoxy is only skin deep and we may not be of any use in mission.

The Orthodox church has an unrivalled tradition of prayer.

True prayer rises from a cleansed heart before God.

'St Maximus the Confessor said that 'without true prayer, our theology is the theology of demons'

## 6 Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals and Charismatics.

If we are anchored in our spiritual tradition we have nothing to fear from Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals and Charismatics.

Many Orthodox, by and large, have an exclusive attitude to these groups. They are frightened to think about them, to shake hands with them, to consider them as brothers and sisters, let alone embrace them.

'Ecumenism' is often seen as a dirty word, a rallying point for battle. This gives Orthodox a bad name. It makes the God of Orthodoxy look pathetic and undermines its mission.

Did God cast off his church in the West after 1000 like a bunch of rotten bananas? Did the apostolic ministry, apostolic Fathers, apostolic sacraments, apostolic creeds, apostolic councils in the church of the West become defunct and incapable of delivering salvation?

If you say yes, well I can't agree with you. If we say no, it isn't like that, then we must find a way of saying so, and of expressing it both in our hearts and in our minds.

We must meet these people and say to their face, you are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

If once it was said, 'there is no salvation outside the church', we must find a way of understanding that in such a way that at least with Catholics we can recognise them as brothers and sisters and that they have salvation.

Then there are the Protestants. Now Protestants on the whole don't go down well in my theology. They threw over the Mother of God, they threw over the Saints, they dismissed the Way of holiness as it had been lived hitherto. What they do, some of them, as 'liturgy', and as 'worship' makes me utterly cringe.

But do we consign them to hell ?

That is impossible.



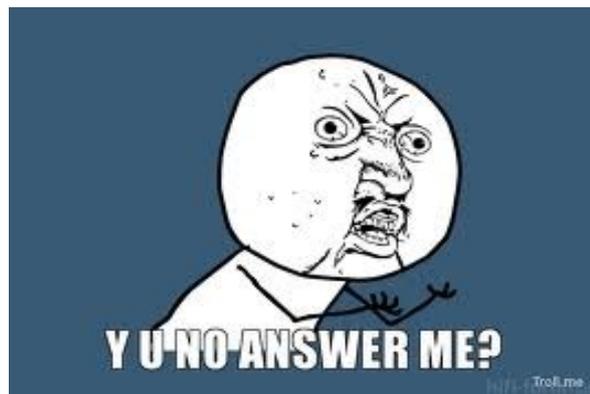
Aggravating though we may find them, Christ wants us to open our hearts to them and find a way of listening to them.

I would even go so far as to say, along with Archbishop Gabriel, that mysteriously we need

one another, if the church, even the Orthodox church, is to have the fulness of Christ.

### Questions

- 1 Orthodox Mission, Protestant mission, do we understand the difference?
- 2 Where is your parish? On 'Mission' or 'maintenance'?
- 3 Plugged into the tradition of holiness = is that you?



Fr Christopher of Argyll had this comment to make

We do need to develop and be allowed to do so and we (like the Russians and Greeks before us), also need to be brave.

What stops us moving on? Ethnicity and poor science. If we were to change every liturgy to English tomorrow and adopt a new calendar with a western Paschalia ( like Finland ) then we would really have made a start!

All Christians should celebrate the major feasts the same day.